

Little White Lies

Arabian
Nights









**TOM
HIDDLESTON**

**JEREMY
IRONS**

**SIENNA
MILLER**

**LUKE
EVANS**

**ELISABETH
MOSS**

**A GREAT FILM...
J.G. BALLARD'S FANTASTICAL VISION
IS BEAUTIFULLY REALISED**

WILL SELF



THE LIST



EMPIRE

**THE HEIGHT
OF DECADENCE**



DAILY TELEGRAPH

**A MULTI-STORIED
CLASSIC...
IT REACHES
DIZZIFYING HEIGHTS**



LITTLE WHITE LIES

**INSANE,
STAGGERINGLY
CLEVER AND FUNNY**

BBC RADIO 1



TOTAL FILM

A FILM BY BEN WHEATLEY
HIGH-RISE

FROM THE ACCLAIMED NOVEL BY J.G. BALLARD

JEREMY THOMAS AND HANWAY FILMS, FILM4 AND BFI PRESENT IN ASSOCIATION WITH NORTHERN IRELAND SCREEN, INGENIOUS MEDIA, SCOPE PICTURES AND S FILMS A RECORDED PICTURE COMPANY PRODUCTION A FILM BY BEN WHEATLEY TOM HIDDLESTON JEREMY IRONS SIENNA MILLER LUKE EVANS ELISABETH MOSS JAMES PUREFOY KEELEY HAWES "HIGH-RISE" DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY LAURIE ROSE PRODUCTION DESIGNER MARK TILDESLEY EDITOR AMY JUMP AND BEN WHEATLEY MUSIC BY CLINT MANSSELL COSTUME DESIGNER ODILE DICKS-MIREAUX MAKEUP AND HAIR BY WAKANA YOSHIHARA EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS GUNN MARTIN PAVEY PRODUCED BY NINA GOLD AND THEO PARK DIRECTOR OF CASTING PETER WATSON THORSTEN SCHUMACHER LIZZIE FRANCKE SAM LAVENDER ANNA HIGGS GABRIELLA MARTINELLI CHRISTOPHER SIMON GENEVIEVE LEMAL 15 STRONG VIOLENCE, SEX, VERY STRONG LANGUAGE
CO-PRODUCED BY ALAINÉE KENT PRODUCED BY NICK O'HAGAN BASED ON THE NOVEL BY J.G. BALLARD SCREENPLAY BY AMY JUMP PRODUCED BY JEREMY THOMAS DIRECTED BY BEN WHEATLEY
FILM4 Screenit HanWay CO-PRODUCED BY ALAINÉE KENT PRODUCED BY NICK O'HAGAN BASED ON THE NOVEL BY J.G. BALLARD SCREENPLAY BY AMY JUMP PRODUCED BY JEREMY THOMAS DIRECTED BY BEN WHEATLEY
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ARABIAN NIGHTS

1

THE RESTLESS ONE

ACT ONE

Where are stories born?

They spring from the
wishes and fears of man.

And what is
their purpose?

To help us survive.



Arabian Nights

Directed by **MIGUEL GOMES**
Starring **CRISTA ALFAIATE, CHICO CHAPAS, LUÍSA CRUZ**
Released **22 APRIL, 29 APRIL, 6 MAY**

Phantom pooches, confused roosters, talking cows, drone strikes, exploding whales and a Portugal on the brink of collapse... Miguel Gomes' astonishing *Arabian Nights* is a new breed of movie epic.

Hands up who remembers Woody Guthrie? Perhaps you've tapped a cuban heel along to his rousing folk standard, 'This Land Is Your Land'? Or maybe you caught Hal Ashby's 1976 film adaptation of his memoir, 'Bound For Glory', in which the nomadic troubadour penned songs inspired by the hardships he saw in Dustbowl America? He was a man who created rough-hewn, but humanist art. It transcended mere entertainment and became folkloric social history, a vital chronicle of a time, a place and a way of life.

There has always been an inkling that Portuguese film director and occasional dandy, Miguel Gomes, styles himself as a modern-day Woody Guthrie, a cine-outlaw riding the rails and filching from reality to feed his fictional fantasias. He, however, is more prone to playful irony than earnestness, even though his aim always remains true. His first great film, 2008's *Our Beloved Month of August*, contained a moment where he offered viewers the sensation of passing through the looking glass from the comforting land of reality into the fictional realm of celluloid dreams. This film – coincidentally about the tradition of folk music in

rural Portugal – highlighted this notion of drawing energy and ideas from the land and from history. The film tries to pinpoint the moment where fact becomes legend, where prosaic events and have-a-go heroes are preserved in the shimmering amber of creative endeavour.

At the beginning of his awesome new three-part feature, *Arabian Nights*, the director appears wearing a raincoat, sitting on some garden furniture at a hotel. His downbeat, confessional narration forewarns that, with this film, he feels as if he's about to embark on a fool's errand. The story goes that he was in a shop with his daughter and she asked for a toy. When Gomes said no, she responded: "Is it because of the austerity measures?" The fact that even his daughter knew about Portugal's slump into poverty was the eureka moment he needed to build a triptych of films – a folly of rare magnificence – which exist as a fleeting survey of a country in dire straits. Like the phantom crocodile at the beginning of Gomes' 2012 masterpiece, *Tabu*, this is a sad and melancholic film, though it is not a maudlin one. Its content oscillates between the absurd and the arcane, focusing as much on minor-scale rebellion as it does on the bittersweet decimation of a rich cultural heritage.





The film is so-called because of its loose allegiance to the canonical Arabian tome, ‘The One Thousand and One Nights’. Yet Gomes takes pains to assure us at the beginning of each chapter that only its structure inspired his film. In the book, virgin waif Scheherazade (Crista Alfaite) uses her skills as a virtuoso raconteur to keep the murderous king from ravishing her and putting her to the sword. She tells him stories about his empire, about survival and custom, about magic and adventure. In this spirit, Gomes casts himself as Scheherazade, while the contemporary politicians and power brokers wreaking havoc on the land are the demonic king. These stories are entertainment, but in such situations, they are also a tonic for widespread misery.

As he deals so directly with “the now”, there’s a reactive feel to the vignettes Gomes weaves, where form is almost a natural byproduct of each new subject. First it’s a documentary, then it’s fiction, then the two worlds collide and all bets are off.

A scene-setting sketch from the first film – *The Restless One* – sees a gaggle of hard-nosed ministers squabbling over Portugal’s national debt repayments in a rural taverna. It is framed as grotesque satire, like a ‘Charlie Hebdo’ cartoon writ large. A wandering soothsayer casts a spell which gives the men bulging erections, and with this libidinous charge, they suddenly become more sympathetic towards the country’s economic restructuring. The absurdist tenor of this opening gambit is crucial – it places this most serious of bureaucratic decisions neatly alongside the more fanciful anecdotes to come. It also expresses Gomes’ belief that stories can still retain their essence and emotion however much you accentuate their whimsical cock-and-bull nature.

The second film – sub-titled *The Desolate One* – opens with another important tale: The Chronicle of the Escape of Simão ‘Without Bowels’. It stars sinewy oldster Chico Chapas as on-the-lam murderer Simão, his anatomical nickname the result of his having a healthy appetite

“While it may outline the extent of suffering caused by economic austerity in Portugal, *Arabian Nights* offers an extravagant expression of optimism in the face of civil desolation.”



but never gaining weight. Gomes unapologetically sides with the daydreaming killer, along with the local populous who are invigorated by this ageing fugitive, who outsmarts the drone technology and bombastic firepower wielded by state oppressors. The film as a whole looks at how momentous political settlements have unknowable human ramifications, but also how they can subvert a basic sense of right and wrong. The dashing antihero is a staple of romantic cinema – but here, that fictional archetype has blazed a path into stark reality.

Gomes applies the reactive impulses of a documentarian with the florid imagination of a fabulist. The element of his films which is at once the most impressive and potentially the most alienating is the way he views time and space as mutable, sometimes opting to have various historical eras existing in the same moment, in the same frame. Mixing timeframes is often a source of mirth – as with the roving peasant in the beginning of the third film who attempts to seduce Scheherazade with his breakdancing prowess. But this off-hand comic displacement is a red herring. For Gomes, history is cyclical and the eccentric travails of man tell a universal narrative. The film's final chapter – dubbed *The Enchanted One* – is also its most beautiful and moving. While the second chapter is the most openly outraged, focusing on destitution leading to crime and death (happiness can only be achieved if you are a cute dog, apparently), part three at once ties up everything that has come before it. It offers a pure expression of how humans instinctively muddle through times of woe. The Inebriating Chorus of the Chaffinches transports us deep into the captivating world of competitive chaffinch song tournaments, where jobless men fixate on the repetitive, three-tier warble of their captured specimens. Chico Chapas returns, no longer as Simão 'Without Bowels', but as himself (or so we're led to believe), an expert chaffinch trapper whose skills help many become part of this delicate sub-culture.

While Gomes is methodical in presenting the various key characters on the chaffinch song "scene", it's not just so he can parlay them into some kind of reality-style competition set-up. This is about homespun culture

erupting through the cracks of depression and the irrepressible nature of poetry. While it may outline the extent of the suffering caused by austerity measures, *Arabian Nights* offers an extravagant expression of optimism in the face of civic desolation. It shows people enraptured by their surroundings, and sometimes not even realising it. Gomes keeps his righteous anger in check, but he also refines his sense of revelry.

The film climaxes on a school choir singing 'Calling Occupants (of Interplanetary Craft)', made famous by The Carpenters to celebrate World Contact Day – an occasion where we might one day reach out to alien lifeforms. Chapas is filmed striding down a country lane having just helped a wind sprite trapped in a chaffinch net. Is it a happy ending? Is Chapas moving forward, triumphant, contented, at peace with the world? Or is he striding headlong into an abyss of unimaginable sorrow? We dream of blissful escape and of exotic lands as a way to fulfil idle pleasures. But movies are those dreams. They are enablers of the fantastic. Maybe this capricious cross-cut of a society in the process of a bitterly poetic transition is the time capsule that Gomes wants to blast into space for the aliens to see. There can be no doubt that its humour, empathy and strange ingenuity would make them want to pay us a visit. **DAVID JENKINS**

ANTICIPATION.

Gomes' previous, Tabu, is one of this decade's finest thus far. So yes, excited is the word.

5

ENJOYMENT.

A freeform mélange of styles and themes that comes together in stunning fashion.

5

IN RETROSPECT.

A glowing lovesong to Portugal performed by a man who has mastered a range of exotic instruments.

5

ARABIAN NIGHTS

2

THE DESOLATE ONE

ACT TWO

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The film director Miguel Gomes writes a letter to himself in the year 2004, just as he was about to embark on a feature film career.

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A Screenwriting Masterclass

Miguel Gomes tells *LW Lies* how writing a movie is a case of constant reinvention.

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What Is Documentary?

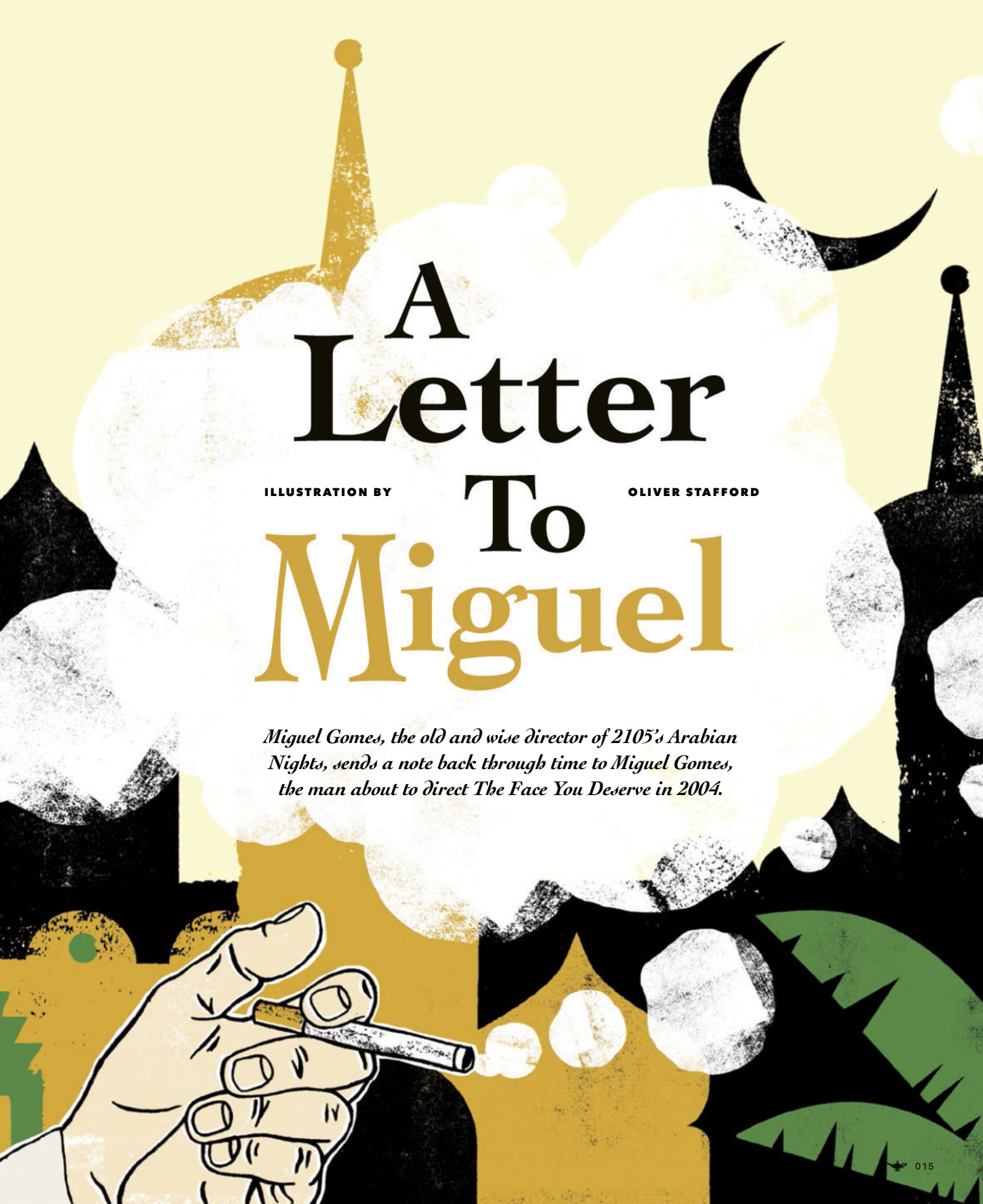
We put this simple question to a host of film industry luminaries to explore the state of documentary in 2016.

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LW Lies looks at the heady landscape of modern movies through the prism of pornography, hand-drawn flyers, teen fantasy franchises, Paris Hilton and more.





A Letter To Miguel

ILLUSTRATION BY

OLIVER STAFFORD

Miguel Gomes, the old and wise director of 2105's Arabian Nights, sends a note back through time to Miguel Gomes, the man about to direct The Face You Deserve in 2004.

LISBON

GOMES,

You don't know me, but I do know you. I've already been what you are, and am sending you this letter from your future. To be clear: I'm writing to myself twelve years ago. In my defence, this absurd idea is not my own, but comes from the magazine where this letter is being published. Please forgive my having had the nerve to go ahead with the challenge on behalf of us both.

But please do not be upset about it. From my vantage point, you're actually dead (in the Proustian sense, I believe you have read him), and I am not yet alive in your time. In reality, you'll never be able to read these lines. You're the prisoner of days long gone. You're also the prisoner of obsessions, preoccupations, methods, enthusiasms and joys that are yours and only yours. Faithful to them, you'll release your first feature, *The Face You Deserve*, and I believe we still have a lot in common. However, there's also a lot of you that is no longer in me. We're two distinct creators in synch with a present - public and private - which we no longer share.

I accept our differences. In some ways, I envy you. More than anything, because you're about to finish your first film, and that is amazing: the vertigo of all the open possibilities sitting on a blank piece of paper! As for me, I keep inventing increasingly bizarre production schemes as I try to regress to virgin territory. To return to first-time filmmaking is an impossibility against which I spend a lot of my energy. For you, it's simply a natural condition.

I also envy your focus. I believe I'm more flexible than you are, but what I have gained in elasticity I have lost in determination. Your lack of self-consciousness - the most undervalued quality in a filmmaker - is possibly more genuine than mine. I have also the impression that you're able to be more diplomatic than me. Contrary to what people say, age doesn't always bring wisdom... those who are stubborn don't always age well.

Of course I've learnt from your mistakes. It was only by the second film, *Our Beloved Month of August*, that you realised you cannot be passive, waiting for problems to sort themselves out without your intervention. It was only then - faced with producers wanting to halt production - that you decided to start all over again and film without a script. You didn't pull pages from the script, nor did you wait for producers to find money. You turned that decision into the structural pillar of the film. It was on this day that you started to become me.

Gomes, there are those who say that each new film that we make contradicts the previous one. Put this way, it seems that we all follow a strategy or a rational desire. But it is in fact the result of something far more practical. Since each film is a total immersion into a world (real, imaginary or both), always thinking about it becomes monotonous, sometimes asphyxiating. To counter this, we start to think about other films, to fantasise about its antidote which is an escape from the total immersion we find ourselves in. You'll see, in the future, that this natural reaction is the genesis of your next film.

But each new film also brings with it a similar, constant movement: that of beginning. First, you have to begin. Then you have to map a territory that is not your own. The fields rescued from our childhood in *The Face You Deserve*, the midsummer Beira villages of *Our Beloved Month of August*, the colonial memory of *Tabu* or the Portugal of newspaper stories reinvented by Scheherazade in *Arabian Nights*. You have to find the characters, the places, the rituals, the myths, the histories and dynamic of the world. And to welcome all contradictions as it is they that create the tension and that invent the cinema. Maybe these days it is easier to find these contradictions. The world seems more absurd today than in your time. Maybe that is the case, or maybe it is just me who sees it that way.

As I prepare to leave once again, the maker of *Arabian Nights* will be almost as distant from me as he will be from you. I'm thinking the new film will be a war film, although I know that what we set out to do is hardly ever what we end up doing. I could tell you a little more about this project and also about a few more personal things, but the truth is this letter will never make it to you, and we should try to stay lucid even when we're engaging with the absurd.

FAREWELL, MY FRIEND.

MIGUEL

A SCREEN WRITING MASTERCLASS BY MIGUEL GOMES

INTERVIEW BY DAVID JENKINS

Miguel Gomes makes movies which stray from conventional norms. They're free-and-easy reactions to the world and the moment rather than the precision-built machines that drop from the Hollywood production line. To help understand how he gets his movies made, we looked at the evolution of his writing techniques, from his 2004 debut feature *The Face You Deserve* through to a forthcoming, as-yet-untitled war movie.

THE FACE YOU DESERVE (2004)

Having made a name for himself with a series of exceptional shorts, Gomes produced this bizarre retelling of 'Snow White' set on the grounds of a large country house.

"For this film, I tried to follow the book. Even if what was I wanted to film was not conventional. I was trying to make a film the way it's supposed to be done. [But] maybe I didn't achieve that. It was not a moment where I was inventing strange or personal ways of working. I remember we had a very tough time making the film. The budget was not enough, so we had to try and film lots and lots of things that were written in the script and it was very difficult. Afterwards, I understood that if you don't have enough money to make what you've written and what you've planned, you have to do something else. Or it's like grabbing pages of the script and putting them into the garbage. I'm not sure this system worked for me, so I prefer to invent a new system for each film I make."

OUR BELOVED MONTH OF AUGUST (2008)

Gomes' second feature brought him praise from all corners, particularly in the way he mixed documentary and fiction in this ultra-lyrical survey of Portuguese folk traditions.

"For this film, we understood that we should film and then write the script after shooting. We wrote a script based on things we had already seen. We had no idea how they would appear in the film. It was a solution to a problem more than a reaction to the process used on *The Face You Deserve*."

TABU (2012)

This is where Gomes became a household name, with *Tabu* winning a prize at the Berlin Film Festival. The two part film captures the youth of a recently deceased Portuguese pensioner and her romantic adventures in the (independent since 1975) colony of Cape Verde.

"For parts of *Tabu*, we just had a long list of possible scenes that were not written. They would have titles

like, 'Aurora plays ping-pong', and so we would decide to shoot Aurora playing ping-pong. So we need a table. Then we build up the scene. Maybe it's raining? So the director of photography put some raindrops in front of the camera lens. Then it started to actually rain, but I preferred the movie rain. But we improvised. At the end of the day, we all came together and decided that the ping-pong scene was okay. So maybe tomorrow we'll shoot number 23 on the list of possible scenes. Some days we would add new scenes, some days we'd give up a few."

ARABIAN NIGHTS (2015)

Originally intended as a small project based on local news stories, *Arabian Nights* became a six-hour, three part behemoth and paean to a country suffering from economic austerity measures.

"When I came up with this film, myself and the writers invented a scientific formula. We divided this big board up in to three columns. In the left hand column we had a list of things we'd seen in newspapers. Then we had a column on the right hand side filled with fictional things. So these were just things that people liked or came up with, or maybe saw in a dream. So we put the dreams here. And then in the final column, in the centre, we just combined them together. A news story would merge with the thing that someone dreamed two weeks ago. This was the start of writing. But of course this is a pretext. There was a moment where myself and the screenwriters were invited to Brazil to host a script workshop. We happened to be working on *Arabian Nights* so we decided we will teach them the three column method. And for three days, they took it very, very seriously. But every day, they became more and more suspicious of this method. By the end they understood that it was bullshit."

FORTHCOMING WAR-BASED MOVIE

Gomes' next movie, of which few details are known.

"I'm not yet at the writing part for this movie yet. I have always wanted to make a film about soccer in Mexico, but my producer said it was too expensive. I was preparing a journey to Mexico, but then I started reading a Brazilian book - the title of which I can't tell you - and I wanted to make it into a film. It will be a war film. It's a literary adaptation, only this time I will try to read the book at least once. With 'Arabian Nights' I never actually got to the end. This time, I've read it once, and will probably re-read it. I'm reading with the guys who are going to write with me. It will be a new process. It's in Brazil. Of course after the script is done, we will then ruin it." 🌴

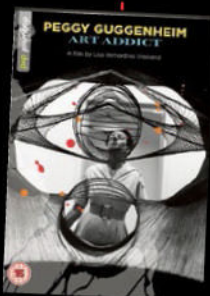
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out now



kikujiro
blu-ray
out now



dolls
blu-ray
released 14/03/16



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also available on blu-ray
released 28/03/16

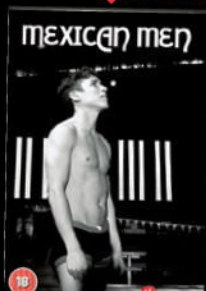


güeros
released 14/03/16

noble
out now



mexican men
released 14/03/16



autumn almanac
out now

peter de rome
released 14/03/16



the lesson
released 28/03/16

tiger orange
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**the
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WHAT

IS

DOCUMENTED



ILLUSTRATION BY LAURÈNE BOGLIO

*Since the turn of the new millennium, the documentary has made a spectacular rise as an entertainment medium. As such, the very concept of what a documentary is, what it means, what it promises to a viewer, remains in constant flux. Even though it contains moments of overt fiction, some critics have described Miguel Gomes' *Arabian Nights* as being a documentary – in that it embodies a number of key characteristics of the form.*

We put the question out there to a host of filmmakers, programmers and producers to find out... what actually is documentary in 2016?

NT'ARY?

MARC ISAACS

Director – *All White In Barking*

Documentary is a word that means less and less to me. It assumes some sort of privileged relationship with the real, as though a documentary is an authentic document of a real event, person or situation. For me, and this is the philosophical starting point of my films, documentary films are simply narratives created by their makers to express their own subjective truth. In the best films, the maker's shadow always looms large over the work – and this should be celebrated.

Yes documentaries can include factual truths and, of course, you do find real people in documentary films, but the best of them concern themselves with the appearance of truth, which is something very different from fact(s). When all is said and done, these debates are probably best left to the theorists, whilst us filmmakers should focus on making our films using whatever methods we deem necessary to transform reality into something more artful.

The eternal challenge, for me, is to find ways of intensifying and poeticising the everyday and this usually means a reimagining of the reality I am faced with rather than being faithful to it. This act of reimagining is hopefully the beginning of the creation of something distinctive and something that makes filmmaking a worthwhile pursuit. In the UK, we are prisoners of the term documentary because of its historical links to television and journalism. If your documentary isn't about saving the world or an important issue, you have a much harder time getting funding. We need to move away from these limitations and embrace films that deal with people and what it is to be human – just like films do.

Isaacs is currently making a film about Arsenal Football Club – his team of 43 years

KIM LONGINOTTO

Director – *Dreamcatcher; Rough Aunties*

For me, the attraction of documentary is that we're taken into someone's world and we get to know them in a direct, intimate way. I live for the moments when a person acts beyond our expectations and when things happen that we could never have hoped for, or imagined. The films I love are about the possibility of change where we watch people struggle to transform their lives.

Longinotto is embroiled in trying to raise money for a New York-set film.

JOSHUA OPPENHEIMER

Director – *The Act of Killing; The Look of Silence*

Documentary is film where people play themselves. Non-fiction scenes are best understood as occasions, created in collaboration between director and participants, in which everybody is pushed beyond their comfort zones (within the overall safe space of making the film). What distinguishes non-fiction cinema is that audiences feel that whatever a character is going through on screen is coextensive with her real life. For this reason, non-fiction footage is sacred, and demands a unique form of empathy from the audience – a deeper empathy that has the power to transform everybody involved, from character to filmmaker to audience to the entire society reflected in the movie.

Non-fiction films are necessarily tentative, exploratory, archaeological excavations... We invent new realities together with our characters, creating situations that shed light on them and their worlds, just as one might apply lamplight to a crystal, searching for just the right angle so that, in a moment of clarity, the crystal's complex architecture shines forth, revealing its multiple facets. A better metaphor: we begin with unknown seeds, helping them take root and grow into seedlings. We grope in darkness to discover what conditions this mysterious plant needs in order to develop and burst into bloom, revealing the splendours that were always there, hidden within the seed. We should explore this magnificence from within and without. We must be the dewdrop that acts as a magnifying glass on the petal. We must be the hummingbird flying overhead. The finished film should be the poetic condensation of all this mystery.

The Look of Silence is available on DVD and download www.thelookofsilence.co.uk

CHARLOTTE COOK

Programmer/Director – *Field of Vision*

Documentary is an art form, craft and a method of storytelling. Rooted in representing reality, documentary can truly be anything and we should be wary of attempting to categorise it. Documentary is one of the most creative realms of cinema, as it can be the most innovative, working with the lowest budgets and least resources with often entirely unknown unfolding

storylines and shooting environments. To call it a 'genre' or to try and encapsulate what is, or isn't, documentary takes its power away. The opposite of documentary isn't 'narrative'. Documentaries are not solely a medium for the dissemination of information or to highlight social issues. They are a vastly wide ranging, powerful and artistic method of storytelling. Documentaries can challenge our perceptions of reality and much as they can enlighten them. They can be a way into worlds, experiences and people we would never otherwise know or understand, and they can also be visionary, performative and magical. At their best they make us reexamine our own thoughts, feelings and perceptions, piquing our curiosity and fuelling our imagination.

*Cook is co-creator of Field of Vision – a visual journalism film unit – along with filmmakers Laura Poitras (*Citizenfour*) and AJ Schnack (*Kurt Cobain About a Son*).*

PAUL STURTZ

Co-Director – *True/False Film Fest*

I met Doc about 15 years ago at a smoke-filled cafe. This was years before Europe and the US suddenly did away with smoke-filled cafes. Doc looked bedraggled and twitchy. But his eyes were on fire. He couldn't stop telling me about his new film. And I couldn't get a word in edgewise. Doc had burned through 500 hours of footage. This had resulted in his girlfriend moving out, his tragic finances cratering, and a nervous breakdown. He would call me late at night and leave crazy messages on my voicemail. But I liked his film which brimmed over with messy life. I couldn't tell whether his protagonist was a hero or a bum. I now see this era as the golden age.

Now Doc has a day job making films and he's become much more efficient. He bombs in for a few days here and there to spend time with his subjects. A lot of the footage is of the subject preparing dinner while talking about what's been happening in their lives. We also see the subject driving a car as we admire the passing scenery, and sometimes a magic radio station comes on with all of the important context. Doc employs a crackerjack editor who's a fixture at The Labs, and a team that builds websites and a social engagement strategy. His polished talk at TEDx is a deeply inspirational paean. Doc ruined lives and was a pain in the ass. But I miss that guy.

The 2016 True/False Film Fest kicks off in Columbus, Missouri on 3 March

GIDEON KOPPEL

Director – *sleep furiously*

Documentary is whatever you want it to be. I still think about and enjoy what Dziga Vertov wrote of cinema in his manifesto 'The Council of Three' from 1923, that the main and essential thing is: The sensory exploration of the world through film. We therefore take as the point of departure the use of the camera as a kino-eye, more perfect than the human eye, for the exploration of the chaos of visual phenomena that fills space.

Vertov's notion of "a sensory exploration of the world through film" suggests an approach to film making in which the camera and microphone are not simply considered to be recording devices, but are used as microscopes through which the otherwise unseen and unheard may be discovered. This might involve looking, listening and responding to the everyday, the unspectacular, however elusive and indescribable it might be to identify and describe in words. It reminds me of what Philip Larkin once wrote, about his childhood home, that nothing, like something, happens everywhere.

Koppel is in New York at the moment trying to persuade the United Nations to allow him access to make a film in their Headquarters.

JEANIE FINLAY

Director *Sound It Out, Orion: The Man Would Be King*

Documentary is an opportunity to meet people I would never meet, and to tell their stories. I make films about shy people telling small stories, quietly. The camera acts as a witness and the broadcast is like whispering into a loudhailer. The stories remain small but the audience can be huge. It's utterly intoxicating. As soon as people start to show off I turn the camera away. There are enough show offs in the world who already have a platform. My aim is to embrace the emotion in the stories that I find and reflect them in my films.

I receive a lot of emails asking if my films are "real" or if "I'm an actress" playing a role. I think, they can't quite believe the story unfurling on screen can be true. Someone called *The Great Hip Hop Hoax* "A hoax within a hoax.... Hoaxception". The world is brilliant, contradictory, devastating and unbelievable. It's more vivid than anything I could ever make up.

Finlay is currently editing her new film.

CHARLIE LYNE

Director – *Beyond Clueless, Fear Itself*

Documentary is a subjective term. If someone believes that, say, *Terminator Genisys* is a documentary, then as far as I'm concerned they're right. No one else has the authority to overrule them – not you, not me, not the director of *Terminator Genisys*. That's why it's such a problem when people start to build walls between those films that are documentaries and those that aren't. According to whom? There are cinemas that offer discounted tickets for docs – in my opinion, they should honour that commitment whether the ticket being sold is for *Amy* or *The Force Awakens*. Most film awards have a Best Documentary category



— they should accept write-in votes for *Creed*. Don't like it? Then stop drawing the line.

Fear Itself is available to view on BBC iPlayer now.

JONATHAN PEREL

Director – *Toponymy*

I see my film as a documentary. I understand it doesn't have very obvious elements you would expect in a documentary. Things such as interviews and information. Especially information. Since I'm dealing with what's out there in the world. For me, it's obvious that I'm not trying to be truthful, in the way

that you would expect documentary to tell the truth. For me you only get my point of view, which is a very narrow one. I like to think of my films as documents, rather than documentaries. It's not a transparent document, but it is a document of something that, since the film was made, will change. Those towns are going to change, but the film will remain the same. I shot in former concentration camps that have already been changed from what they were – they are museums or memorials now. Fictional films are documents as well – of the streets that were shot at a certain moment, or how people looked at a specific time. That's the nice thing about the material we're dealing with – it captures reality. Saying all that, when I have to fill in a form to submit the film to a festival, it's a documentary.

Toponymia is a film looking at four strange, near-identical villages that were built following Argentina's military dictatorship, and is winding up its tour of the festival circuit and Perel will start work on his next film soon.

MARK COUSINS

Director – *The Story of Film, Life May Be*

Documentary is me, my camera and the unexpected. When you film a documentary, life comes barreling at you like a wild bear, so the filmic equivalent of the fight or flight mechanism takes over. Things happen and you try to frame them visually, capture the key words (if there are words), think ethically, and keep one eye open, beyond the camera, all at once. You're submitting to events, people, tensions, ch-ch-changes. When you're making a doc, you try to be your best self. You are caring on the hoof, judging what matters and what's moving, and – always, somewhere, if you're good – keeping the plate of form spinning.

Of course, most of that could be said of Cassavetes or Bertolucci or Akerman's fictions, but the zone doesn't have clear demarcations. The zone is just making scenes that are new and true, sincere or hopeful, a kind of darshan. When you make a documentary, you need to submit, to be humble about how little you know and how much you want to know. You're not Tarantino or Von Sternberg. Read Karl Marx and you find out what documentary is. Read Freud and you find out what documentary is. Documentary makes you feel young, un-jaded, alive, hungry. The greatest films are documentaries.

Cousins' excellent film I Am Belfast is reviewed on page 64.

ROBERT GREENE

Director – Actress, Kate Plays Christine

Documentary is an attempt to capture the swirling chaos of the real world and give it a structure so that a meaningful signal can be found in the noise. Documentary is not a genre, but a way of seeing; it can be observational or reconstructed, rigorously shaped or built on the freeform, anti-narrative rhythms of being alive. No matter the contour, a documentary must have some unbreakable link to actual experience or it's a fiction film. But the line between fiction and non-fiction is endlessly unstable. This is because no matter how authentic the content, a documentarian must make filmmaking decisions, which are inherently manipulative (they have to be!). So in essence, non-fiction cinema is the act of fictionalising what really happened or happens. Because this process often involves real people and their actual stories, it's fraught with immense ethical and moral ambiguity. These tensions between the real and the constructed, between the aesthetic and the ethical, give life to the form; the best documentaries embrace these frictions and make use of them to create meaningful, layered cinema. This is why non-fiction is my favourite kind of filmmaking: it's both constricted and liberated in thrilling ways.

Greene's film Actress played at the Open City Documentary Festival in 2015, while his latest work, Kate Plays Christine, picked up an award for documentary writing at the 2016 Sundance Film Festival.

JESS SEARCH

Chief executive – BRITDOC

Documentary is the art of moral contemplation. Every film tells a story about some people, some events, some places. These stories can be of huge, world-shaking significance or they can be close, quiet and tiny. And stories can be spun in any form, told in a hurry or slowly, in anger or in wry merriment. But a documentary is always at its heart a moral inquiry. It is an invitation to the audience to join a process of questioning how we should best live (and sometimes how we should best die). Life is endlessly complex and we are blessed to have an art form which provokes us to see ourselves and others in many different lights and shades.

BRITDOC are a body committed to connecting audiences around the UK with great documentary filmmaking

RAYA MARTIN

Director – Independencia, La última película

Documentary is the imagination of our modes of production. After the 1902 volcanic eruption of Mount Pelée, Georges Méliès produced the spectacular *Éruption volcanique à la Martinique*. In the early morning of May 8, a full yellow moon shone over the sprawling greenish village at the foot of the trembling volcano: smoke spewed upwards, but not before another burst was mutually bounded by the mechanical deterioration around its celluloid edges. Debris spread over the French Caribbean town, as darkness almost enveloped the whole frame. An eerie isolation of the destructive cloud continuously built



up towards the explosion of the whole film set, which was constructed from paper maché. An abrupt ending of the nitrate film shocks the viewer. No human figure was ever visible throughout, but there was one surviving witness of the actual catastrophe. "I felt a terrible wind blowing, the earth began to tremble, and the sky suddenly became dark," remembered Léon Compère-Léandre, a shoemaker who survived with severe burns. By 1914, Méliès' success had been bankrupted. Towards his death, the director burned most of his films, as the French government salvaged the silver nitrate on its country's productions to support the war.

Cold War cataclysm encouraged the

film school generation to preserve their personal memories of war. In the spring of 1976, Francis Ford Coppola had begun a monumental odyssey with *Apocalypse Now*. Film production in the Philippines had hired the country's military defence department, and even used dead bodies of insurgents as movie props. The few scheduled months had expanded into years, with budgets shooting up to millions of dollars more. The Coppola family, who had temporarily moved to the islands, wasn't alone in the hysteria: actors teetering their own sanity, either refusing to play the roles, or becoming the roles themselves. The director's wife, Eleanor, followed her husband around the turbulent backstage and produced *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse* (co-directed with Fax Bahr and George Hickenlooper). The director later declared that his movie is not about Vietnam, but is Vietnam. He had performed the war again in the neighbouring islands. The behind-the-scenes documentary was an attempt to articulate an irrepressible madness. It is the mode of production of our imagination.

Raya has recently been doing performance work and is launching a film festival called UNDocumenta together with Antoine Thirion which is coming April 2016.

JOHN PILGER

Director/Journalist – Utopia, The War on Democracy

In industry surveys, when people are asked what they would like to see more of on television and in the cinema, they say documentaries. I don't believe they mean exhausted formulas about estate agents, traffic police and airports. Neither do they mean a type of "current affairs" that is a platform for politicians, "experts" and mere gestures at truth, that strike a specious balance between power and its victims, oppressors and the oppressed. I believe they mean what James Cameron called "truth-telling journalism captured movingly on film": documentaries that are the antithesis of media clichés and platitudes: that strip away the façades of "official truth" and rescue unpalatable facts and historical context from the memory hole to which "impartial" news has consigned them. At its best, a documentary is an insurrection of subjugated knowledge that helps its audience make sense of the world, big and small. Whatever the subject, unforgettable documentaries are

subversive, because the truth is subversive.

Pilger's next documentary is The Coming War between America and China, due for release later in 2016.

HELEN DEWITT

Programmer – Head of Cinema at BFI

In our constantly shape-shifting culture it is increasingly difficult to discern definition and distinction between art forms, and this can lead to a cynicism about meaning. So rather than seeking an essence, it seems more useful to think what documentary does, what it is for and why we really, really need it. Documentary is undeniably political. Driven by a desire to create change, whether in our understanding of the world or in the world itself. This unites the most serious of documentaries – the Nazi exposés of Marcel Ophüls, to mock docs of Christopher Guest. Both, whether grave or frivolous, expose us to a critique of our culture and its nebulous values and, more than that, puts us in a position where we have to examine ourselves in relation to what we are seeing. This, I think, is what distinguishes documentary from fiction film, although they can look alike. We may find temporary identifications in fiction films, see ourselves as the hero or engage with the perils of the victim, but it is documentary that contains a call to action for change. It may not always be campaigning for the release of a death row prisoner or to take action about climate change, it could be just a nudge towards a greater understanding of and compassion towards humanity. This is what makes documentary a personal encounter; rather than spectators, we become witnesses, and as such our relationship becomes an ethical one. Only cinema, with its ability to record and represent the world in an analogous way to our experience of it, can create in us this deep empathy, capacity for tears, anger, enthusiasm and even faith.

OLI HARBOTTLE

Documentary Distributor, Dogwoof

I like to think of documentary as a house, where there are various windows on different floors and sides which all offer different views to the world outside. But the windows are also mirrors, as they all offer a chance for self-reflection. There are also no walls as such in the house, in the same way that there are no boundaries or rules in documentary. So

I guess the house isn't a true house, in the same way that documentary should not be seen necessarily as truth. But there is a roof for the community who open those windows and extend those walls, and the foundations for the house are there and are deep-rooted in reality. And the door is always open and everyone is welcome.

Dogwoof's upcoming releases include Hitchcock/Truffaut, Mapplethorpe: Look at the pictures, and Heart of a Dog. Visit www.dogwoof.com for more details.

SERGEI LOZNITSA

Director – The Event, Maidan

The material of my film *The Event* was shot in the manner of a documentary. After that, what I did with the footage – the sound, the editing – it's all creation. The form of the film is a creation. There is one historical mistake in the film – I won't say what it is – but it's necessary because of the thing that happens after. It is not a documentary, but it is a documentary. Is it a post-documentary? I don't know. It's a creation, but it's also a document. Like in physics – it's the difference between a wave and a particle.

Loznitsa The Event is a film constructed with found footage about how the people of St Petersburg reacted to the eventual fall of the Soviet Union. His fiction features, My Joy and In The Fog, debuted at the Cannes Film Festival.

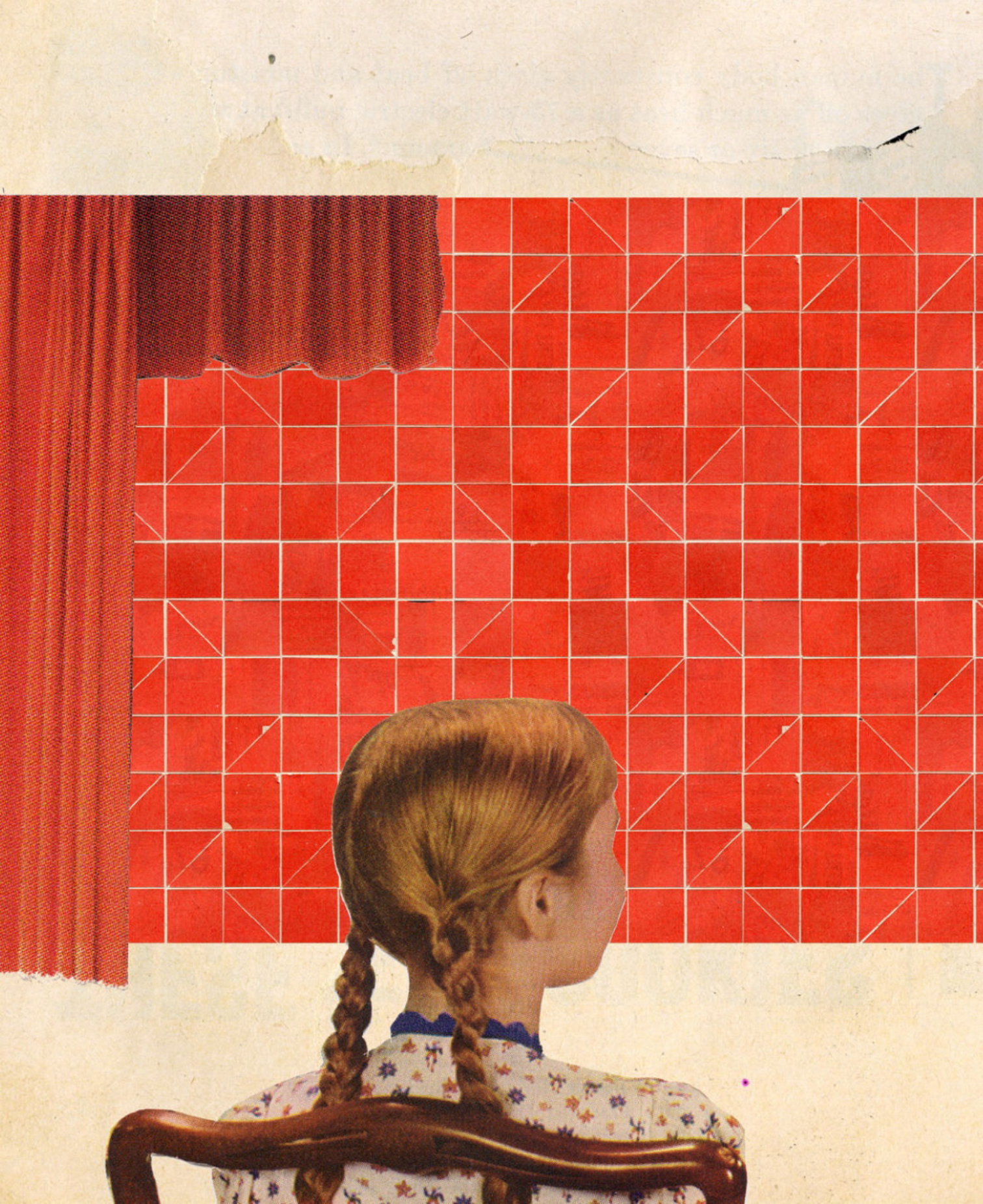
NATHAN SILVER

Director – Stinking Heaven, Actor Martinez

That is a loaded gun of a question. The term documentary is fluid, but so is everything else in the world. The world has become this ridiculous place where nothing can be defined. I am a humanist to the core, but when you can't define a single thing on Earth, it's just mad. That's where we're headed – to madness. And the internet is helping to perpetuate this idea that humans can be anything. I can be a five-year-old black kid if I wanted to. And I could get two black adoptive parents, because I say that. People are doing these insane things all over the place, and I just wonder where it ends. Where does documentary begin and end? I don't know. Nobody can give a firm definition to anything. No-one's allowed to. If you say something that doesn't conform to the liberal agenda, you're instantly called out. I'm sure even saying this will offend

people on Facebook. If you go against what people are saying, you have to be ready to be chewed apart. You can't define documentary any more without being called out on it. It's all in the air. I feel like it's a drunken boat. But the boat has become drunk, and not the people on the boat.

Nathan's film Actor Martinez, co-directed with Mike Ott, premiered at the 2016 Rotterdam International Film Festival.



Tales of Cinema

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ANTHONY GERACE

Inspired by Miguel Gomes' tactic of story collecting for Arabian Nights, LWLies set out in search of off-the-beaten-path true tales in the hope of glimpsing the soul of cinema today. In the coming pages you'll find stories of obsession, accidents, gambles and mortality. We'll take you behind the projector to meet filmmakers who reincarnate the same fiery car crash in every film they make, an eccentric fighting to use antiquated means to promote his parlour cinema, a journalist who accidentally nets more on a set visit than the eventual film's entire box office takings, a projectionist who can effortlessly elevate a dud, a writer who by losing his integrity finds the key to new Hollywood economics and the secret source of a state-of-the-art star's power. Now, let's load the first reel...

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY

GREG EVANS, NICK PINKERTON, SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN,
DAVID JENKINS, ETHAN VESTBY, MARK ASCH, VADIM RIZOV



The Tale of...

Troma's Exploding Car

WORDS BY SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN

Ultra-low budget, New-York based underground film studio Troma Entertainment is known for “42 years of failed film-making”. This is according to Lloyd Kaufman who co-founded the studio in 1974 with Michael Herz. Troma trademarks are unrealistic gore, gleeful bad-taste humour and generous nudity. There is also a sequence that has been lovingly recycled in features, shorts and even music videos to give fans a long-term running joke. The sequence is spectacular car crash footage in which a blue-green 1978 Ford Thunderbird hits a car parked in the middle of the road, does a slow-motion 360 degree flip, lands on the ground and then explodes.

“It’s like the Alfred Hitchcock cameo now,” says Gabe Friedman, former Troma editor and a passionate cheerleader of what he calls ‘The Kabuki Flip’. The stunt was originally filmed for the 1990 film *Sergeant Kabukiman NYPD*. At the time Troma had an unprecedented amount of money thanks to Japanese investors, NAMCO (the creators of Pac-Man), who stumped up half of the film’s \$900,000 budget.

Lloyd Kaufman remembers the day of the shoot: “We had five cameras. I was on the camera that was closest to the car and the stunt-man driving the car was a cowboy. He went too fast so the car went higher and further than anyone expected. I put myself on that camera because that was the least safe camera and I have little, or no, will to live, but the car didn’t get to me. I swear I ran away from the camera while that car was coming at me, but I got the shot so I must have stayed there, but my soul, I think, departed.”

The resulting sequence was re-used six years later in the film *Tromeo and Juliet* co-written by *Guardians of the Galaxy* director, James Gunn. In the re-edited crash scene, James Gunn is in the driver’s seat, joyfully singing ‘Found a Peanut’ with his on-screen family before a severed head bounces onto the car bonnet causing screams then fiery disaster. Frank Reynolds, who edited *Tromeo and Juliet*, regrets not fully enjoying his brief stint at Troma, because of having had one wistful eye on the mid-’90s indie boom spearheaded by directors like Whit Stillman and Kevin Smith.

Still, a consummate pro, he went though what, prior to digital technology and sophisticated editing suites, was a manual process of finding film stock that would suit a physically made copy of the car crash master-negative. He made a copy then had to use glue to splice it into the new reel. In the process, he made his own little mark on the sequence. “Before

the car flip there’s a strange point-of-view shot through a windshield. I accidentally got that shot when they gave me the copy of the car flip. They gave me a good 30-second chunk of the movie on a film print. I said, ‘Oh, I’ll use this shot,’ and didn’t expect it to stay in the movie. I think it wound up staying in every time they subsequently recycled it, which I thought was kind of funny. I never thought that they were going to use that shot again and I think that was due to Gabe as well.”

Gabe Friedman took the editing baton from Reynolds, inserting the flip into three films: 1999’s *Terror Firmer*, 2000’s *Citizen Toxie* and 2006’s *Poultrygeist: Night of The Chicken Dead*. The latter title Friedman also wrote in college. He has a palpable sense of honour regarding use of the flip. “I think fans expect it. When you go to a screening and The Kabuki Flip comes out of nowhere, it’s more than tradition. Respect it. The question is, ‘Where are you going to put it in?’”

Keeping tradition alive is taking increasing levels of imagination. The Ford Thunderbird was used in 1990 because it was cheap to source. Now, over 25 years later, it has – unfortunately for Troma – become a classic car. Hard to find and even harder to prise away from owners. Travis Campbell, who transferred the original film element to high definition for 2013’s *Return to Nuke ‘Em High Volume 1* and 2016’s *Return to Nuke ‘Em High Volume 2*, was there for the first time could not find a matching vehicle. Thanks to a little campaigning from The Kabuki Flip idealogue, Friedman, a way was found to use the crash footage anyway. “They just shot the actors in I think it was a white car and the camera was really close up on them.” Campbell explains. “Then you would cut to different parts like The Kabuki Car turning a corner. We had to cut around the clown, of course. While they shot close on the actors, they shook the car. There was someone holding a branch running by. The camera would be on a dolly going back and forth to give the illusion of the car moving.”

Return to Nuke ‘Em High Volume 1 and *Return to Nuke ‘Em High Volume 2* are passion projects that have been a long time coming. As well as The Kabuki Flip, there is an extra treat that was supposed to be a surprise for Troma fans, but Kaufman has said that we can reveal (“You’re welcome. You do what you want.”) An extravagant stunt from *Troma’s War* (1988) of a car shooting off a dock and then exploding above a boat will be somehow shoehorned into the narrative. Will this come to replace The Kabuki Flip? ✚



The Tale of...

The Porno Restoration

WORDS BY NICK PINKERTON

Sex sells — it also comes with a sell by date. The Internet pornography era and the public's inexhaustible appetite to see every variety of the human animal engaged in every possible act of the act of physical love means that thousands upon thousands of new fuck flicks will flood the market every year, sweeping yesterday's product off of the (now mostly virtual) shelves. But as time marches on, this ceaseless influx only serves to underline the scarcity of adult films produced before the porno-industrial complex had streamlined its production methods, those films — real, analogue films — which survived offering tender commemoration of sex acts which occurred in faraway, fantastical times, like the Ford administration.

One of the first films commercially distributed by Thomas A. Edison, Inc. in 1896 was the 18-second kiss between stage actors May Irwin and John Rice, and ever since, the unblinking lens has borne witness to countless acts of staged intimacy. "Smokers" and stag reels soon proliferated the world over, projected clandestinely in brothels, basements, and lodge meetings. You may get a glimpse at typical examples of the material in a 2002 compilation film assembled by Michel Reilhac, *Polissons et Galipettes*, comprised of silent pornographic vignettes filmed between the turn of the last century and around 1930. It had a modest boutique release in the English-speaking world under the title *The Good Old Naughty Days*.

What vintage adult films remain today, however, represent only a fraction of the total produced — in no area of film history outside of the silents is such a small portion of total output made to stand in for the whole. The reasons for this are manifold. Men who owned blue movies were not generally inclined to pass them along to posterity, and many studios who produced adult films during the porn chic era discarded their film holdings *en masse* during the VHS changeover, disregarding the use-value of these films beyond immediate salacious salability. Certain productions have additional value as film art, even those that don't possess intrinsic historical interest. Adult films are beloved of art directors for the glimpses they offer of period interior décor untouched by the hand of a set dresser, and cherished by sexologists as documentaries illustrating how folks — or at least professionals — fucked in bygone years. So what is happening to our dirty movies? Who is minding our world heritage of smut, and assuring that these remembrances of orgasms past will not disappear from this earth?

Legend has it that the pornography collection at the Kinsey Institute at Indiana University spans the breadth of the moving image's lifespan and is second only in size to the holdings at the Vatican. Though the Kinsey Institute have a significant spank bank, the nearest thing to a proper "archive" dedicated solely to the

collection of X-rated material is in the possession of The Institute for the Advanced Study of Human Sexuality (IASHS), founded in 1976 in San Francisco by Rev Dr Ted McIlvenna and Laird Sutton, two former Methodist ministers who over the course of a half-century amassed a collection of some 2,000 feature adult films and 20,000 loops, including material they themselves produced. Other American archives, particularly University of California at Los Angeles, have significant adult film holdings, though these are almost never the films singled out for preservation attention. Dan Streible is a professor of archival research at New York University and the organiser of the Orphan Film Symposium, who in 2010 played a role in restoring a stag reel, *The Janitor* (c. 1930), from the Kinsey Collection. "Most film archives have pornographic materials in their collections," Streible tells me, "but they don't advertise as such, and they don't put it in their catalogues. They don't destroy it either, but in terms of expending preservation dollars, it's rare for these things to be prioritised."

Long before the digital changeover affected the rest of the industry, adult theatres were already purging themselves of 35mm analogue equipment, and today the porno theatre as an institution barely hangs on, a shadow of its former self. As a young man I was acquainted with the Foxchase 3 in Alexandria, Virginia, outside Washington, DC, which divided its three screens between XXX and second-run art house fare. (I saw *The Royal Tenenbaums* there with my mother; it was demolished in 2005.) Where adult theatres can still be found at all in the United States, they function as pick-up places for a mostly graying, Grindr-illiterate clientele on the make for same-sex action — this is certainly the case with the Fair in Queens and the Cinema Kings Highway, New York City's last remaining jack shacks.

The public screening of adult films has today entered its museumification period, though many institutions remain hesitant to touch material which is widely viewed as having been created for the express purpose of stirring tumescence. Here, as in archiving and restoration, one must contend with the board's conservatism. The programmer of one New York City institution tells me that the only time his higher ups ever vetoed a programming decision was when he tried to play *Deep Throat*. In more recent years Radley Metzger and Joseph Sarno, both principally known for their softcore efforts, have been honoured with NYC retrospectives, while Anthology Film Archives has hosted a recurring "In the Flesh" series, projecting 35mm prints of thematically grouped hardcore titles. In 2012, the International Film Festival Rotterdam played an eighteen-film tribute to the transgressive sex-death cinema of São Paulo's 'Boca do Lixo' — the name translates as 'Mouth of Garbage,' and refers to a grotty, working-class neighbourhood in the centre city roughly equivalent to Times Square — including fresh 35mm prints struck by the Cinemateca Brasileira.

Even in stuffy, Quaker Philadelphia there have been changes afoot — in 2014 the city's International House hosted a "Cinema of the Sexual Revolution" program which included some of the so-called "pattern films" produced by McIlvenna and Sutton under the auspices of the Multi-Media Resource Centre (MMRC), sex-positive shorts recruiting the services of avant garde filmmakers like Constance Beeson, James Broughton and Barbara Hammer. "Sex in San Francisco" at the Yerba Buena Centre for the Arts focused on home-grown material from the late '60s and early '70s, including 1968's *Meat Rack*, the sole directorial outing of Michael Thomas, the former Strand Theatre owner and Strand Releasing founder. Los Angeles's Cinefamily has proven friendly to adult films, as has the Brooklyn-based microcinema Light Industry, whose catholic programming includes Underground, exploitation, and gallery-world work, and who have dabbled in X-rated material — MMRC shorts, *Meat Rack*, and a recent program by filmmakers Gabriel Abrantes, Alexander Carver, Benjamin Crotty and Daniel Schmidt, tracking the trajectory of queer imagery from Jean Genet and Kenneth Anger to the "bourgeois lifestyle fetishism" of a 2014 gay porno called *Kiss•Hug•Fuck•Love*.

"Over 10,000 hardcore features were produced during the theatrical exhibition heyday of adult movies."

An invaluable resource for information pertaining to all of the above, and a mover and a shaker in more than one of these series, is Joe Rubin. Co-founder of the digital restoration lab OCN Digital, since 2012 Rubin and his partner Ryan Emerson have run a home video company called Vinegar Syndrome, named after the telltale stench emitted by celluloid that has begun the process of irretrievable decay. While preparing this piece I spoke to Rubin, a serious proselytiser for adult film, who eschews the term "pornography" because he feels that it "pre-supposes the intent of the creator," and puts a premium on restoring the original visual texture to the films that he works with, so to encourage their re-evaluation as works of art rather than mere vehicles for the delivery of filmed sex.

An inveterate collector with an ever-growing collection of holdings to choose from in his Bridgeport, Connecticut facility, Rubin estimates that over 10,000 hardcore features were produced during the theatrical exhibition heyday of adult movies, between the late '60s and the beginning of the '90s. The process whereby he decides which among these films are worthy of resuscitation is a compromise between commercial considerations and personal

passion, what he calls striking a balance between "average movies that I'm pretty sure will make money" and "movies that I think are interesting, important, or worthy." In the former category he places the films of the prolific Carlos Tobalina, like *Champagne Orgy* (1978), in the latter, releases like Bob Chinn's *Prisoner of Paradise* (1980) — described as "an ambitious Nazi-themed action period piece that feels like a regular exploitation film that just happens to be hardcore" — or the double-feature of *Baby Rosemary* (1976) and *Hot Lunch* (1978), two excursions into XXX by the prolific horror director John Hayes.

Other boutique Blu-ray labels like the Euro-centric Severin, Synapse (through their Impulse line), After Hours and Blue Archives have released adult movies sourced from film materials, while labels like Gourmet Video, VCA, VCX, and Caballero, focusing on the "Golden Age" of porn, tend to work from 1" video sources. Aside from Vinegar Syndrome, Distribipix are the only company who've been so single-minded in their dedication to home video releases of X-rated material taken from original film sources. Founded in 1965 by partners Arthur Morowitz and Howard Farber, Distribipix, Inc. were a prolific producer of original material for the adult circuit, distributing films by Metzger and Sarno and featuring stars like Annie Sprinkle. Unusual among their contemporaries, Distribipix, who never moved shop from New York, retained the negatives of their own films as well as the Sam Lake Enterprises catalogue, and under the ownership of Arthur's son, Steven Morowitz, they've continued to add to their library. Steven, who prefers the term "erotically-charged films," took on the administration of an archive of "thousands of elements, hundreds of films" at the end of the wholesale DVD boom times in the early '00s, but today concentrates on "quality and limited runs," giving what he called "Criterion-type treatment to *Inside Jennifer Welles*," boasting of single-minded devotion to each release resulting in "60-page liner notebooks, two pounds when they ship, they're big, they're gorgeous, every part of it reeks of soul and love."

Morowitz, a one-man industry who says he runs Distribipix "like a deli," along with Vinegar Syndrome, represent a hardcore of hardcore, dedicated to ensuring the preservation of America's adult film heritage. Abroad, parallel efforts are made: Rubin speaks highly of the Danish Film Institute's willingness to celebrate their nation's history as adult film pioneers, the first country in the world to legalise pornography. Alpha France, founded in France in 1969, would appear to occupy a position roughly analogous to that of Distribipix in the US, making available high-quality versions of their own archive titles. Nikkatsu, Japan's oldest movie studio, are as willing to celebrate their Roman Porno and "pinku eiga" output of the 1970s as any of their more traditionally prestigious accomplishments.

More often, however, adult films languish in neglect, fitting Streible's definition of an Orphan Film: "a literally abandoned piece that has wound up in an archive with no-one acting in its interests... virtually anything that's outside the commercial mainstream whose copyright owners are either unknown or absent." And in this vast ocean of neglected, largely-unexplored material, there may yet be untold treasures — so do keep an eye out when clearing grandpa's attic. ✦





The Tale of...

The Paper Trail

WORDS BY ETHAN VESTBY

A quiet tragedy is currently unfolding in Canada's biggest city – Toronto. There's an atmosphere of increasingly sterility; a gentrified landscape of condos and business towers is driving artists away in droves to neighbouring industrial towns such as Hamilton or Detroit where rent is dirt cheap. Yet if the airless, alienating feel of living in Toronto borders on not just "uncoolness" but rather some kind of paranoia, there at least remain some surface traces which remind us of the city's glorious past.

Reg Hartt is pure Toronto old guard. He's a former student-run alternative cinema studies instructor who, for over 40 years, has made his mark on Toronto's film scene. He does this not entirely through his unconventional views on the medium, but more explicitly through fliers placed around town, advertising his personally organised screening institution, the Cineforum.

These fliers still manage to decorate streetlamp poles and the urban bulletin boards otherwise known as the Public Message Centres that stand across the city. While the average board is overwhelmed with plugs for tutors or home philosophy classes, the longevity and ubiquity of Hartt's fliers have certainly made the biggest impression – a drawn replica even made the cover of a 2004 'Punisher' comic-book.

Most notably, they've been all put up by Hartt himself and not a team of young interns or devoted fans. The fliers are often entirely in black and white, without a noticeable picture or focus. Bold lettered headlines such as "LSD" (read the smaller print and you'll see not for sale, just a class on its meaning in cinema) or "Jane Jacobs" (the name of a Toronto-based urban activist and author of the seminal 'The Death and Life of Great American Cities' with very likely little presence to millennials) act as selling points, though it's difficult to figure out why so. Possibly, it's this very lack of graphic design panache that has lent them an almost unintentionally "alternative" edge. Yet it helps that it's all at the service of such a strange venue.

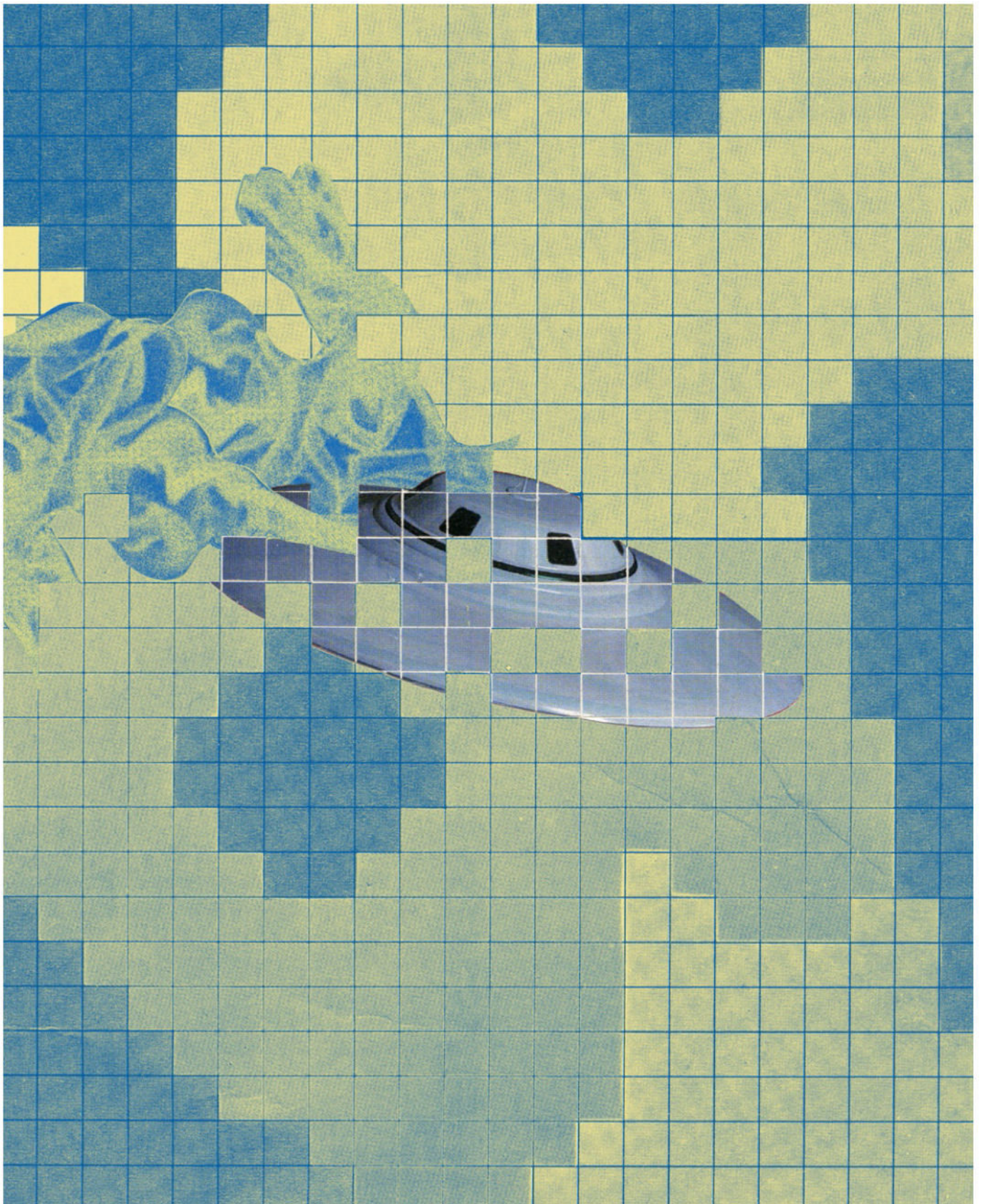
Opening in 1992, the Cineforum is a 40-seat screening room in the front parlour of Mr Hartt's own townhouse. A most-frequently screened list sets out tastes likely to scare-off

non-cinephiles; seminal silent films (*Metropolis*, *The Birth of a Nation*) or selections from the avant garde, and all topped off with an accompanying lecture from Hartt. One thing you'll never find in any university film class is Hartt's most frequently advertised and perhaps personal screening item; *Kid Dracula*, his own "fan edit" of FW Murnau's *Nosferatu* which bears the distinction of being scored to both Radiohead's 'OK Computer' and 'KID A'. The German actor Max Schreck could be his poster boy.

Yet even for Hartt's bold confidence, such as having publicly compared his venue to both Andy Warhol's Factory and Henri Langois's Paris Cinematheque, in the millennial age of the Holy Facebook/Twitter/Instagram Trinity, his chief form of self-promotion, his fliers, can't help but seem paltry, even if only speaking to a prospective audience of forty.

That said, clearly far more have noticed than film fans, in particular city hall. In 2010, Hartt was targeted by Toronto's Licensing and Standards division over the omnipresence of his fliers around town, calling into question the aggressive marketing of what they considered an "illegal", unlicensed business. Whenever Hartt faced this problem in the past he turned to his liaison with the city's higher-ups, the aforementioned Jane Jacobs, after her death in 2006 he found an unlikely defender in the city's notorious former mayor Rob Ford (a reminder, the one who made international headlines for his crack smoking). In early 2011, Ford overruled the violation against Hartt, though ironically in the next year Ford made a point of decreasing the presence of posters around town; issuing a strict reminder of by-laws stating what can and cannot be "promoted" (chiefly cultural instead of business-related services) and where items can be placed.

Hartt and his fliers haven't simply opposed authoritarian forces. Since 2010 they've fallen victim to a smear campaign from someone who Hartt claims to be a rival advertiser. Posters around the city have accused Hartt of sexual deviance, as well as put out threats of violence (even offering cash rewards for doing so) against him. But despite the few political allies (chiefly city councillors) he's gotten on his side, in the past few years, his only way to fight on is to simply keep posting flyers and running the Cineforum. ✚



The Tale of...

The Residue Set Visit, the Wind and the Whiplash

WORDS BY GREG EVANS

The first problem of the day occurred on the train journey from London to Leeds, a large city in Yorkshire, northern England. Two burly chaps in suits had occupied the table seat I had been allocated and were determined to use as much of the available space as they could. This was not the biggest inconvenience of the journey. Away from this territorial skirmish, gale force winds were causing havoc for National Rail.

The service was running an hour late, and after about 30 minutes of waiting on a train platform in Doncaster, passengers were informed that the train would only be going as far as York. There, we would then have to transfer to a smaller commuter train. Leeds was reached around four hours later than expected. I was greeted by two charming PRs and a driver from the set whose job it was to whisk us off to our destination. I was accompanied by another journalist, who I discovered had endured the exact same journey as me. I no longer felt alone in my logistical trauma.

Around five minutes later, we were involved in a minor car accident. A careless Porsche driver had pulled out of a busy junction and clipped the front of our modest hatchback. For a brief moment I thought I might have been involved in the film some way. But no, this was real life.

The driver stayed behind to sort out the insurance details while me and my journalistic brother-in-arms were finally delivered to the destination in another car. By this point, it was about 2pm in the afternoon and we were informed that the aforementioned high winds had prevented the production crew from shooting half of the footage they had planned for that day.

From what I could see, the set was supposed to be an army base, but I was only able to speculate as there was hardly anyone around to confirm my assumption. It was a rather low-budget affair. The kit being used wasn't exactly cheap, but to give a sense of scale, this was not a Christopher Nolan budgeted film. Given the circumstances, everyone seemed in a good spirits, if not understandably exhausted. All was not lost, however, as the crew were also filming a scene in a converted railway tunnel, which I was allowed to observe. Unfortunately, it was so dark that I was unable see a thing,

and had no idea what was happening. This was the only piece of filming I would witness for the entire day.

I then spoke to writer John Harrison. He was affable and upbeat when talking to me about the details of the film. This was his baby after all. He also expressed some concern about my recent accident, which was nice of him. Considering we had just been in a crash, we were later taken to a nearby bar where we were inspected by a paramedic who advised that we should all make an insurance claim for whiplash. We remained in that venue for around two hours drinking tea and playing 'Who am I?' (the game where you have to guess the name of the celebrity stuck to your forehead) before being taken to a double-decker bus where we ate steak and cauliflower. I did two interviews on the bus with two actors who seemed to be having as much fun as I was. Shortly after that, we caught the last train home due to the weather. That was the last time I ever thought about the film *Residue*.

Fast-forward two years and a friend of mine has decided to count down the UK's lowest grossing films of 2015 on Twitter. At the number one spot was the film *Residue*. I had no idea it had even been released, let alone achieved such an ignoble accolade. Rather confusingly, the box office revenue was for a theatrical cut of *Residue*, which has since been turned into a TV mini-series for Netflix. I watched the film in its new incarnation and – just like that day in December – it was confusing, unfulfilling and made me realise that I could have probably spent the time doing something much more productive.

The plot revolves around a government conspiracy to cover up an explosion in a futuristic UK city. The blast unleashes some sort of possessive virus, which causes its victims to commit horrendous acts. A rogue private eye and photographer then investigate the incident only to uncover the shocking truth. In terms of acting it was perfectly competent and was stylishly shot, the lightning being a particular treat. The actual premise and narrative made little sense, which probably explains why it never caught on. The name *Residue* isn't the most pleasant of words either. "One for Residue please," isn't a sentence anyone would willingly want to say. The film itself grossed just £15. The whiplash insurance claim I made yielded £1000 in compensation. ✚



The Tale of...

The Hottie and the Nottie

WORDS BY DAVID JENKINS

In theory, the new horizon of digital film exhibition eliminates human error. No more old dudes with smoky fingers up in the projection booth who have neglected the instructions that come nestled in each can of film. The problem of reels being shown in the wrong order is no longer an earthly concern, in that film can no longer be quantified in reels – there's only one way through a digital file. Along with that, there's no wear and tear on a digital file. It can exist forever, or at least until it's no longer compatible with the hardware.

Celluloid enthusiasts have stood by their cause and made the argument that seeing a film projected on film is equivalent to looking at an original painting in a gallery. Watching a film that has been projected digitally is the same as looking at a soulless facsimile. Celluloid also adds the element of chance into the film viewing process, as each projection of the film is going to be ever so slightly different from the last. Digital, conversely, is a uniform process – everyone gets exactly the same experience, all films are made equal. Movies as cans of Coke.

The year was 2008, and celluloid factionalism did not yet have a reason to spring into existence. All films that made their path through cinemas were routinely projected on 35mm film, though admittedly the tides were turning. One reviewing assignment I was given involved spending an evening sampling a forthcoming title called *The Hottie and the Nottie*, a comic starring vehicle for hotel heiress and sometime screen actor, Paris Hilton. Prospects for the film were dim, perhaps due to Hilton not having a particularly voracious fanbase in the UK. The release was likely the result of a contractual obligation. Yet, viewers who ventured to that screening were treated to the full 35mm shebang.

Critics were invited early to invade the venue's well-stocked bar, possibly in the hope that a few units of alcohol might enhance amusement for the work. We eventually took our seats and the red velvet curtains parted. Magic time, as Jack Lemmon used to say. Paris Hilton was, of course, cast as the eponymous "hottie", with actress Christine Lakin camouflaged in prosthetic facial warts and fake buck teeth to fulfil her role as the "nottie". The concept of the film is that to get with the "hottie" you also have to put up with the company of her best friend, the "nottie". Our babyfaced hero, Nate Cooper, played by Joel David Moore, attempts to slime his way into Paris's bikini, though is constantly scuppered by her repugnant companion.

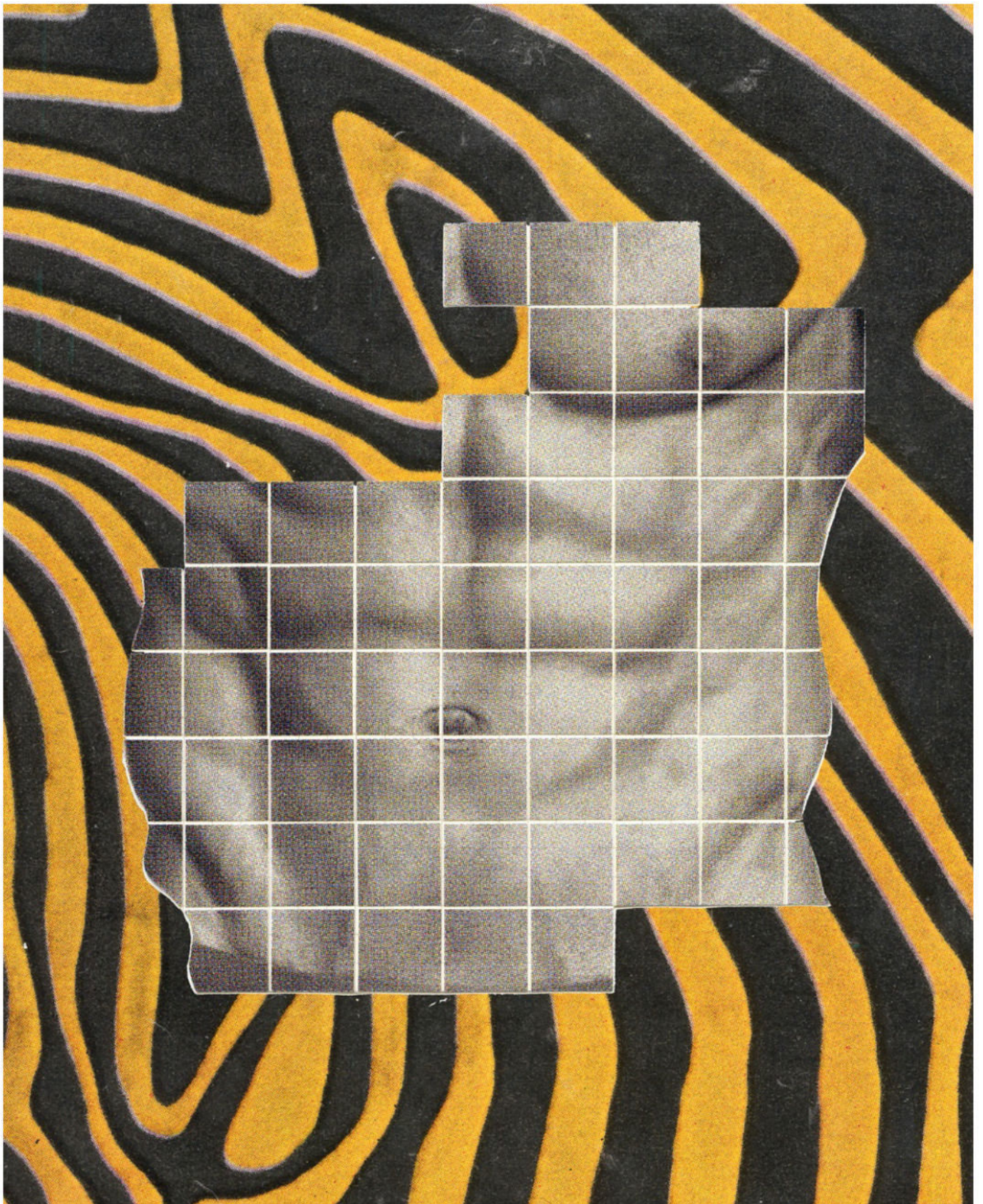
Aside from its dunderheaded celebration of body fascism, the film displayed little in the way of wit or sophistication. Indeed, every punchline suggested that to canoodle with

Paris, one must accept the odious baggage of her unlikely entourage. Perhaps it was intended as a biographical metaphor in which Hilton requires adulation on more than a superficial level? Suffice to say, the joke was lost on an audience who were becoming uncomfortable in their seats. Some perhaps pondering whether they might be witnessing what could be one of the worst films ever made.

But then something happened. And it turned the entire sordid affair into something memorable, amusing and, dare I say it, rather beautiful. As Joel David Moore delivered another line of banal dialogue, the furry boom mic became clearly visible above his head. The shot reversed to Hilton, and as she spoke, there again was the boom mic hovering at the top of the frame. In the instant, my brain interpreted this image as a sign that the film was so awful, its makers had neglected to notice a mic clearly entering into the field of vision.

Surely this was some kind of event horizon of atrocious craft? Considering the weakness of its concept, it made total sense that it would be similarly slipshod on a formal level. I even convinced myself that I hadn't seen it, that the mic was probably just a protruding lampshade or somesuch. But ten minutes later, during a scene taking place on a luxury yacht, there it was again, inelegantly dipping in from the top of the frame. And then for the remainder of the film, every shot featured the boom mic. All of a sudden, a piece of depressing dreck has been elevated to a cine-literate, self-reflexive satire on trash cinema. Just as a director like Jean Luc-Godard might cut through a scene of sincere drama with a shot of the clapper board as a reminder that what you're watching isn't reality but a subjective conception of reality, so at that point did I think the makers of *The Hottie and the Nottie* has become wise to the absurdity of their endeavour and decided to shatter the illusion of fantasy.

The following day I contacted a publicist to ask if the film had been projected incorrectly, or whether we had actually been party an ironic intellectual experiment. Looking in to the matter, she returned with the news that it has been screened in the incorrect aspect ratio, and as such the masking was off kilter. Masking is the process of adjusting the outer edges of the screen (the majority of cinemas boast the capability) to fit the aspect ratio of the film. Because the masking had also been botched, the audience that night were able to see information at the top and the bottom of each frame that was supposed to be concealed. This projectionist doing his job badly turned a night of potential cinematic ignominy into a reminder of the glorious, combustible quality of celluloid. This truly was a night to remember. ✦



The Tale of...

Chris Hemsworth's Abs

WORDS BY MARK ASCH

Chris Hemsworth's abs: out of habit, we would call Chris Hemsworth's abs a "six-pack," but in fact, I count eight distinct muscle bellies within the single rectus abdominis muscles, as in a medical textbook. They protrude from his torso like the lumps on a rubber suit worn by an old *Doctor Who* alien. The linea alba, the north-south seam separating the two ab stacks, is probably deep enough to channel liquid, were Chris Hemsworth to ever pour an entire bottle of water onto his bare chest while shaking the sweat from his locks.

The top layer of articulated abs make a sort of inverted V, almost in the shadow of Chris Hemsworth's pecs. The second row appears to be the largest, each roughly the size of the back of one of Chris Hemsworth's hands – which are very large. The third row of muscles are more rounded, their bottom borders curling out from his belly button in more of a W pattern. Chris Hemsworth's rectus abdominis becomes progressively narrower, reading top to bottom, like an arrowhead pointing at Chris Hemsworth's groin.

Question: how does anyone have enough time to maintain that musculature *and* an affable social-media presence? I guess if you post status updates between sets? I guess we'd all have enough time, if we had enough money. The article "Chris Hemsworth's God-Like Thor Workout," in 'Muscle & Fitness' magazine, describes a five-day circuit (plus bonus ab circuit) encompassing daily sets and super-sets of body-weight and weight-training exercises designed by a former Navy SEAL. The article makes no mention of cardio, but I assume Chris Hemsworth does some cardio. Cardio's important. Does Chris Hemsworth read? Maybe he listens to audiobooks on his iPhone, from which he can also Tweet, and text his friends, the ones who maybe are at the office, or at Happy Hour, or reading. I assume not all his friends have abs like his. But maybe they do. He's Australian, and enjoys surfing, Muay Thai, mountain biking, or so I am led to believe by a 'GQ' article entitled, 'Meet the Manliest Man in Hollywood.'

As Thor, on Saturday Night Live, and during his cameo in the comedy film *Vacation*, Chris Hemsworth displays a blithe, hunky humour and awareness of his good fortune. The gimmick of Thor is that he is not a superhero but an actual God; a bit of self-deprecation is called for, both on-screen and off. The Manliest Man in Hollywood shows the 'GQ' reporter a scar earned when he accidentally stabbed himself as a small child, while snorkelling and trying to catch a fish. He was excellent in the film *Cabin in the Woods* as an artificially pumped-up movie-movie jock archetype who dies horribly and

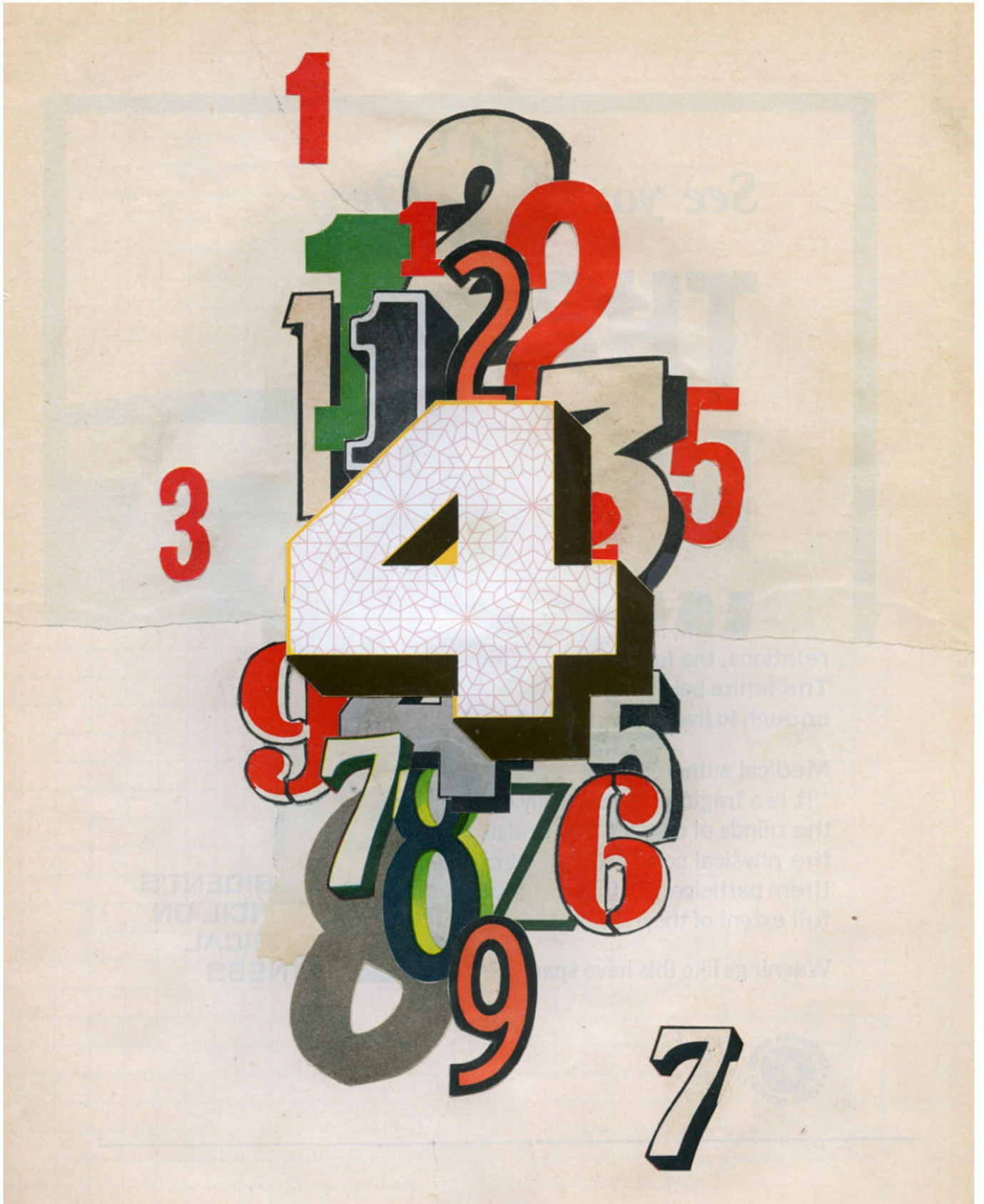
unheroically. Did you know he was on the Australian version of 'Dancing with the Stars'? He's the one who brought it up.

The first attitude that Chris Hemsworth's abs present: otherworldliness, beauty, Idealism in the original sense of classical philosophy, of a true divine form made miraculously manifest in human flesh. This is intimidating. The second attitude that Chris Hemsworth's abs present is markedly less intimidating, but it follows directly from the first: compliance. Because, sure, God made Chris Hemsworth in His own image, fine. But who made God? Of Michelangelo and David, who is more powerful? Of Thor and Marvel Studios?

That a young actor might be simultaneously superhuman and submissive is, of course, not news to any female performer in the history of the arts. But among this generation of male movie stars, Chris Hemsworth is not atypical in his willingness to play along, to display a perfect self-awareness to go along with his perfect physique. On YouTube is a video of Ryan Gosling smiling sheepishly, winningly (dreamily!) as he accedes to an online video-news outlet's request to read aloud from various fan memes associating him with various feminism-adjacent attitudes; Ryan Gosling also has negative body fat. The entire run of sitcom '30 Rock' offered up a parade of male guest stars — James Franco, James Marsden, Matt Damon, Jon Hamm — all eager to offer a time-lapse mimicry of Alec Baldwin's inexorable transition from Jack Ryan, the steely blue-eyed hero of *The Hunt for Red October*, to Jack Donaghy, the sitcom's steely blue-eyed television and kitchen-appliance executive.

There are seven billion people on earth, and several billion social media users. We think of everything, collectively if not individually. We can interact with our idols, calling out bad behaviours and demanding recognition for good attitudes and good causes, giving very definite verbal cues to the machinery of celebrity journalism and publicity — not just consumers but workers seizing the means of production from the old studio-system titans. Our celebrities are crowdsourced, featuring every customisation we can think of. It's impossible to be as well-read and well-informed as the aggregate of your social-media feed. But Chris Hemsworth is an aggregated person.

The stars of Golden Age Hollywood were gods, too, but flawed, quirky gods: nary a Zeus among them, but a decadent Dionysus (Clark Gable), a spry Hermes (Fred Astaire), a shuffling Hephaestus (Jimmy Stewart). Anyone can do a funny Jimmy Stewart impersonation. How can you imitate Chris Hemsworth without first embarking on several cycles of his God-Like Thor Workout? ✦



The Tale of...

'I Am Number Four' and the YA Cinema Machine

WORDS BY VADIM RIZOV

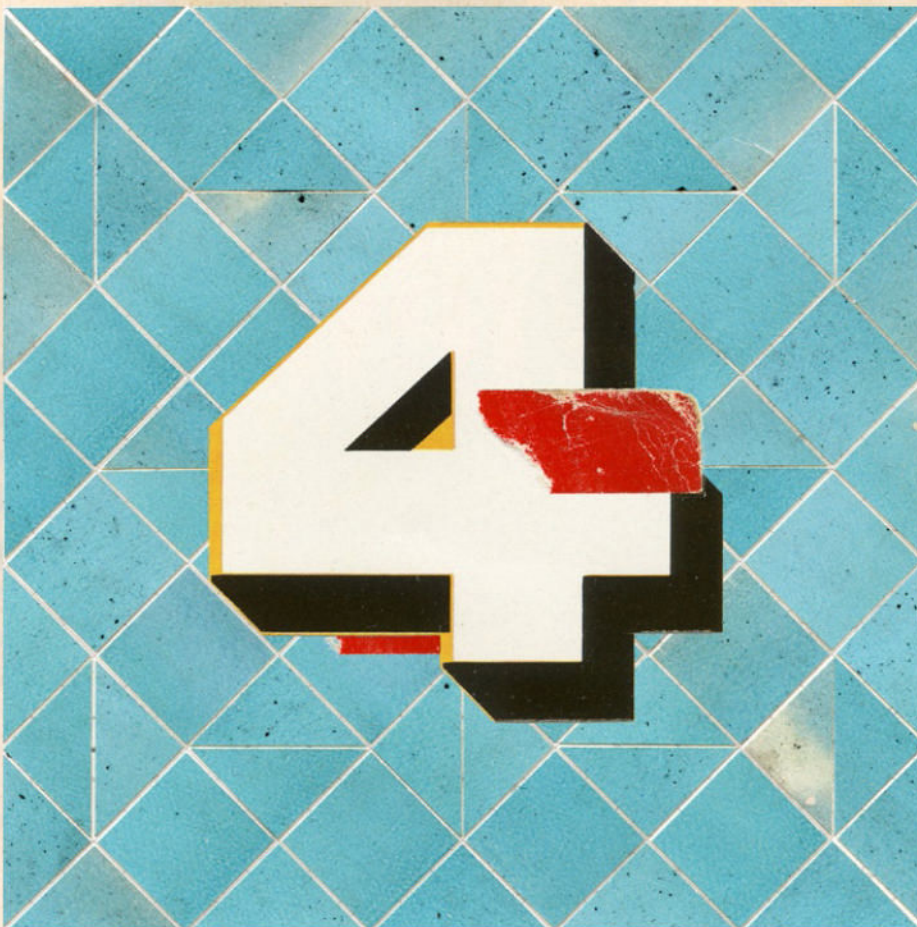
A recent literary history recap: James Frey emerged with 2003's 'A Million Little Pieces', a respectfully reviewed memoir of alcoholism, addiction and recovery. In keeping with his book's manly, don't-give-a-fuck literary persona — capitalising all nouns (proper or not), writing in Hemingway-esque macho present-tense, rejecting AA's guidelines to find his own path to sobriety — Frey presented himself as a brute force of nature opposed to "effete" literati. Here was a boxing enthusiast, lover of NWA, and pit bull owner — and, as was subsequently discovered, something of a fantasist whose "memoir" was heavily fictionalised. The resulting fallout (including a class-action lawsuit against his publishing house) threatened to hound Frey out of the literary market.

Frey responded by setting up camp in Young Adult terrain with *Full Fathom Five*, a sort-of writers' sweatshop with draconian terms (writers may receive as little up-front as \$250 for a full book). In the wake of *Twilight*'s immense success on page and screen, the goal was clear: easily sellable YA fiction that could be extended into multi-part franchises, themselves easily adaptable for the screen. The idea for 'I Am Number Four' was Frey's, the execution care of Jobie Hughes. There was a fierce bidding war for the manuscript, sold to Steven Spielberg and Michael Bay before it had been completed. Frey claimed he inserted "cool swords" for the genocidal aliens from the planet Mogadore at Spielberg's request, and for future marketing possibilities.

The result is a book that's clearly meant to be easily translated to the screen without too much strain, and a case study in by-the-numbers bandwagon jumping. Number 4 (pseudonymously John Smith) is the good alien from Lorien, shot into space like Kal-El from a dying Krypton. The plot requires him to stay on the run to avoid the Mogadorians' attentions, so it makes story sense that he'd keep a low profile in small towns. This, coincidentally, also saves production costs as there is no need for crowd control or the expenses that come from sealing off busy urban streets. The plot is "archetypal," ie generously repurposed from familiar elements to save brain strain. The hero is seemingly ordinary but of course extraordinary, undergoing a *Karate Kid* arc as the new boy at school who stands up to bullies and wins the prettiest girl's heart. Development of his superpowers comes in training sessions with his guardian, Henri, in sequences you can see easily condensed into Yoda-on-Degobah montages.

The script was produced by screenwriters for *Smallville* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, whose experience with longform serials meant they presumably could set up an extended narrative to be completed over seven instalments. Their most important task was to create a love triangle that's simply not present in the first volume (the seventh and final part of "The Lorien Legacies" will be published later in 2016). The book's Number Four falls for local girl Sarah, and there are in-between moments of very soppy romance ("She reaches up and pulls my face to hers and kisses me, her soft lips on mine... I don't ever want her to stop kissing me"), but action is the main focus. The movie reverses that balance, with lots of teenagers staring wistfully into the distance as ballads play during the set-up. In the back half, fellow hero alien Number Six shows up, and while she's a fierce warrior, there's no hint of romantic spark between her and John. But when Number Six shows up in the movie, she's a leather-suit-clad bomb-thrower who suddenly makes Sarah seem implausibly dowdy in comparison, cracking lewdly in the midst of battle, "You're good with your hands." The idea was to let audiences know that there would be an Edward-Bella-Jacob triangle to anticipate, which the first book leaves as a latent possibility for the second to deal with.

There are only a few blips of eccentricity in the book. One is the inside-joke new identity John is given when it's time to flee town again: "Jobie Frey," combining the twin authors of the book. Another is a scene where our protagonists break into a conspiracy theory magazine's offices and demand to see the reporters' notes, a nightmare you might imagine Frey himself having. The movie is a straightforward, time-padded thing that's considerably worse than its source material. The cost-saving small town setting is naturally retained, and because the features of "Paradise, Ohio" are so generic, the generous tax credits of Pittsburgh-area suburbs stood in just as well. A few smart decisions were made in the adaptation process, the best being to ditch the complicated mythology and its appendix of cumbersome made-up mythology proper nouns ("Cepans," "Guards," etc). Hollywood convention demands that all on screen be gorgeous, even John's best friend, nerdy Sam Goode. Callan McAuliffe, who plays him, is more than presentable, so the filmmakers suggest the charisma gap between him and number Four (Alex Pettyfer) via age difference: our protagonist is visibly five years older than his co-star. A small touch for teens: Sam is poor, John laden with resources, and we can see that because Sam has a flip-phone to John's smartphone.



One reason *I Am Number Four* might have failed at the box office where franchises like *Twilight*, *The Hunger Games* and (to a lesser but ongoing extent) *The Maze Runner* thrived is because it cheaped out. The big monsters are A-OK, but \$60 million doesn't buy a lot of CGI hellscapes; uncharged romance subs in for spectacle. Another might be a strange disloyalty to the dynamics and tone of the morose book, ditching both its plot points and urgent self-seriousness. Critics moaned at the padding-out tactics of stretching out the final instalments of *Twilight* and *Hunger Games* into two parts, but at least no fan could feel vital points had been tossed aside. *I Am Number Four* is more a hijacking of an established brand than a reverent big-screen presentation of it.

There was, I suspect, a deeper problem, a point of emphasis thoroughly fudged by the adaptation. *Hunger Games* and attendant rip-offs struck a nerve for validation-starved teens by presenting seemingly ordinary protagonists who don't just save the world, but defeat the rotten ageing authoritarians

that have driven the planet into the ground. This is a rousing sentiment for an economically depressed epoch. These books/movies stage a generational divide in clear, morally righteous terms, but 'I Am Number Four' as a book is a little more complicated. We learn that the Loriens once almost destroyed their planet through gross environmental abuses, but learned from their mistakes and nursed home back to health.

In contrast, the Mogadorians ruined their planet, then went searching for others to harvest and suck dry. In this allegorical scenario, humanity is both alien species: the earnest eco-conscious warriors for scaling back the folly of our ways before it's too late, and the cynical, or oblivious who resist acknowledging global warming. All that backstory is stripped from the film version, which means John Smith is just facing up against some tall aliens with Maori-esque face tattoos who want to conquer the planet. No more generational divide, just another edition of man versus Predator-esque hunters.



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2015

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ON THE DISCOURSE
OF CINEMA

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THE GUARDIAN

NIRVANA
FOR MOVIE LOVERS

ROLLING STONE

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ARABIAN NIGHTS

7

THE ENCHANTED ONE

ACT THREE

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Son of Saul

Directed by
LÁSZLÓ NEMES

Starring
GÉZA RÖHRIG
LEVENTE MOLNÁR
URS RECHN

Released
29 APRIL

4

ANTICIPATION.

The Palme d'Or winner that should have been.

4

ENJOYMENT.

It's calculated to stun and, on those terms, it's ruthlessly effective.

4

IN RETROSPECT.

The brute force is punishing, but there's real moral and intellectual rigour behind it.

With his powerful debut feature, Hungarian director László Nemes uses a single blank face to convey the unspeakable. His protagonist – the titular Saul (Géza Röhrig) – is a member of the Sonderkommando, a group of Jewish prisoners who empty the gas chambers in the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp in exchange for paltry privileges during World War II. Through long takes and shallow focus, the camera is permanently trained on Röhrig's face and, as the encircling horrors close in on the margins of the frame, we can only process them through his expression. In doing so,

Nemes captures the horrors of the traditional Holocaust movie though the questionable impassivity of a single man.

This ingenious technique places the audience in the precarious role of moral arbiter. What we project onto Saul depends not only on our reaction to the material, but on our relationship with this notorious moment in history. In this sense, Nemes strips the Holocaust movie down to its most essential element – a sustained attack on the human body and spirit. The director trusts us to fill in the blanks – a bold proposition in the face of the film's paralysing brute force.

At its core, *Son of Saul* is about the unwavering pursuit of a single act of decency in the face of overwhelming atrocity. As he clears out the gas chamber with his fellow Sonderkommando one day at the end of 1944, Saul finds the corpse of a boy he believes to be his son. Determined to give him a proper burial, he furtively sets out on a search for a rabbi to help carry out the deed. In a situation where death is ubiquitous, the act of burial is not only a humanising ritual standing at odds with the degradation of the Third Reich; it connects Saul to his persecuted religion. It is an expression of atonement, devotion and defiance.

This central idea of the burial is the anchor in the tempest, offering a clear moral trajectory through myriad horrors which can often threaten to overwhelm it. Indeed, stylistically, *Son of Saul* is calculated to stun. The camera chains us to Saul, but the sheer chaos of the world around him is omnipresent. The sound design is nauseatingly effective, with the hellscape of the camp imposing itself as a cacophony of screams, barks and the distressing white noise of human suffering. It is like being embalmed in a nightmare, engulfed in a fog of obscured horror. The audience is pummelled by the violence off camera, but Saul is our witness. He sees everything and we see him.

The notion of the burial – and the difficult

tasks required to fulfil it – is what carries us through the maelstrom. As the turbulence hits you on a physical and emotional level, Nemes pierces through the clamour by giving the story a mythical bent. The idea of seeking a burial for a loved one, for example, comes from the Greek myth Antigone. Similarly, the Sonderkommando are men in purgatory, carrying out the devil's business. They usher their brethren through the chambers to Hades. They are the conduits between the living and the dead, and they bear the burden of watching their people die. Nemes strips the role of the Sonderkommando from its complex historical context; his cinema is one of physical force and powerful mythical imagery.

As a subjective document of war, Samuel Fuller's *The Big Red One* from 1980 serves as an interesting comparison piece. Both pictures confront the enormity of history by focusing on the day-to-day lives of their protagonists. Fuller's film, which carries the weight of anecdote, acts as a filter for the haze of his and star Lee Marvin's own memories of war. It is a great war film because it finds enduring truth in everyday minutiae. In taking the subjectivity a step further, *Son of Saul* appropriates the experience of one man to find the crux of a historical moment which, in its scale and cruelty, still seems beyond comprehension.

More broadly, the Holocaust movie as a genre is about reconciling the personal with the historical, seeking understanding by projecting small stories against the wider socio-political narrative. In eschewing this approach, Nemes is able to locate the harrowing essence of the Holocaust – the degradation and destruction of human beings. *Son of Saul* could be seen as an effort to unshackle cinema from the traditional Holocaust narrative and, in turn, capture the core of the 20th century's greatest atrocity. In this sense, Nemes' method challenges the cinematic representations of the Holocaust, which, beyond the austere, unflinching eye, is the picture's greatest strength. **CRAIG WILLIAMS**





László Nemes

We meet the director of the year's most intense and nightmarish movie, *Son of Saul*.

Hungarian director László Nemes, whose powerful new film tells the unique story of a Jewish man working in the gas chambers of Auschwitz, is a passionate advocate for the cinema experience. He was the only director at the 2015 Cannes Film Festival - at which he won four prizes - to have shot and projected his film on 35mm. A fierce preference for celluloid is one of many opinions on the medium that the 39-year-old debut director holds dear.

WOULD YOU EVER MAKE A FILM TO BE RELEASED ON A STREAMING SERVICES LIKE, FOR EXAMPLE, PAUL THOMAS ANDERSON DID WITH HIS JONNY GREENWOOD DOC, *JUNUN*?

I'm sure Paul Thomas Anderson doesn't fight against cinema because he tries to defend it. I know that for sure. At the same time, I know that the way television works is destroying cinema. Actually it already did destroy cinema. Television and the internet are based on a certain set of aesthetics, and the ways

of constructing a show have changed a lot of things in the making of films. The internet is an endless stream, it's endless content. Film in cinema is a darkness experience. We as human beings are put into an experience which is communal, but at the same time we're alone in darkness, and I believe in that, in the magic of that, in the fact that we're experiencing something that we don't control. We are in the experience in an immersive manner, and cinema has this strength. The way we see television or the internet is something completely different. It changes the minds of people, but it doesn't create more emotion. The audience engagement is not there.

SO YOU WOULD NEVER RELEASE YOUR FILM IN A STREAMING SERVICE?

I think films should be experienced as films. You don't go to the museum in your computer, or go to the theatre in your toilet [Nemes is so agitated that he knocks over a glass of water]. This is not the way [*LW Lies* begins to mop up the water] it's fine... this is not the way... I'm getting, you know emotional obviously. It's how the industrial push is disrupting certain valuable forms of human experience and of experiencing art.

DOES IT MAKE YOU CRAZY... I SAW *SON OF SAUL* IN CANNES AND LOTS OF PEOPLE WERE ON THEIR PHONES.

When they killed the lights or when they switched the lights back on?

WHILE THE FILM WAS RUNNING.

They were looking?

YEAH.

During my film?

YEAH, IN CANNES.

Where did you see it?

RIGHT WHERE I WAS SAT DURING THE FIRST PRESS SCREENING.

People would do that?

YEAH. WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THAT?

Fuck them.

ME TOO. THAT'S WHAT I THINK.

Fuck them and I wouldn't allow... I mean telephones into... It's like now we have the minds attuned to the internet, but the internet is endless. It doesn't bring you emotion. It doesn't... it makes a robot out of you. Making people become robots and now getting into all this virtual reality bullshit. This is the end of civilisation. We're going there and this has nothing to do with the human experience. This is computers taking over our minds. Kubrick saw it. It's just scary how much of a prophet he was. We're losing so much and we're heading towards disaster 🌪️

"Provokes, seduces and enrages"

THE GUARDIAN

MAPPLETHORPE



LOOK AT THE PICTURES

IN CINEMAS 8 APRIL

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Victoria

Directed by
SEBASTIAN SCHIPPER

Starring
LAIA COSTA
FREDERICK LAU
FRANZ ROGOWSKI

Released
1 APRIL

3

ANTICIPATION.

Another one-take wonder, this time from Germany.

4

ENJOYMENT.

When it's good, it's really damn good.

3

IN RETROSPECT.

Unwieldy by design, it does just try a little bit too hard to impress.

With the rise in prominence of digital video cameras, filmmakers can shoot any old shit and then build a movie in the editing suite. Hit 'record', let the actors prance about for a few hours in the hope of eliciting at least a minute of gold, repeat to fade. Back in the good-old-bad-old-days when film was a valued commodity and planning was paramount, you had to know exactly what you wanted to do and say in advance. Filmmaking was a case of forming a cogent statement and then building it as best you can. Now, we can just blurt out anything and as long as there's a lens being pointed in our general direction, and we've got ourselves some cinema.

Sebastian Schipper's *Victoria* offers a modern ode to that classical form of filmmaking which elevated cold, hard preparation to the level of an art. The film was shot in a single continuous take between 4.30am and 7am on 27 April 2014 on the streets of Berlin's southwestern hipster enclave of Kreuzberg. There are no invisible edits or fudges – everything you see happens in real time. As with Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Birdman*, there is the faint whiff of gimmickry to the enterprise, but at least with Schipper's film he gives the tantalising impression that the entire movie is always on the verge of falling to pieces. *Birdman* had production sheen, where this has true grit. By the end, its actors are panting wrecks, entirely drained by this madcap undertaking.

Victoria (Laia Costa) is our guide through a distressingly eventful pre-twilight sortie in which carefree post-pub frolicking takes a surprise turn for the deadly. We meet her as she's chugging back shots at an underground techno club and unsuccessfully attempting to chat up the barman. Then, in that special way that only happens when you're half-cut on schnapps and staggering through the streets with no place to go, she starts gabbing with a small gang of young men and they become fast friends.

Though the men are presented as cheeky ne'er-do-wells, Schipper declines to profile them as archetypes straight away. For its opening hour, it gives us a blissfully honest and freewheeling portrayal of tipsy camaraderie, the likes of which are seldom captured with such heady nostalgia. Victoria is game to be part of their various monkeyshines, such as robbing booze from the dozing proprietor of an all-night grocer, or hollering abuse at a passing cop car. The motley crew even spirit her away to a rooftop hideaway on a grim tower block which offers a striking panorama of the sleeping city.

Frederick Lau's mouthy, puffy-eyed charmer Sonne leads the gang, clad in a

scraggy tracksuit top and with cigarette constantly dangling from his bottom lip. The small ensemble attain a state of perfect harmony in these early scenes, making their interactions feel entirely natural and the ensuing frisson of romance wholly plausible. As Victoria and Sonne start to coyly flirt, it's incredible how Schipper presents two characters who are clearly besotted with one another, though each refuses to let down their guard lest they annihilate the sense of fun dictated by the occasion.

These scenes are so charged with euphoria and joy that it comes as something of a disappointment when they come to an end and the serious second act kicks in. All this was a slowburn set-up for another, more generic plotline, as Victoria's devotion is tested when she's pulled in to help the guys with an urgent criminal endeavour. This section of the film is more impressive on a cold technical level, dispensing with much of the messy humanity of the opening salvo. Where Sonne was once a chancer with a twinkle in his eye, he's now a whiny sad-sack who – having known her for just over an hour – is comfortable allowing Victoria to risk her life to help them save theirs.

Logistically staggering though it is, *Victoria* is half a great film and half an okay but silly film. The single take strategy makes total sense, and it does manage to supercharge the simple material without drawing too much undue attention to itself. But with its story being split so cleanly in half, it's hard to decipher what – if anything – the film is trying to say. Victoria herself works in a cafe having departed from her dream of becoming a piano virtuoso, and maybe the film has an underlying conservative streak where it says that none of this would've happened if she had been more discerning and less impulsive. At 138 minutes it also outstays its welcome by a good 30 minutes, but there are good stretches of this film which touch on the sublime.

DAVID JENKINS





Sebastian Schipper

The German one-take wonder on his new movie, *Victoria*.

Shooting a film in one take fits with the wild character of German director, Sebastian Schipper. *Victoria* tells the story a young Spanish woman who – on a night out in Berlin – meets a man and follows him into deep trouble. *LWLies* found out about Schipper's passions as a man.

WHAT'S THE CRAZIEST THING YOU EVER DID BECAUSE YOU WERE ATTRACTED TO SOMEONE?

I think everything I'm doing is because I'm attracted. To not give you a philosophical answer: I was in Portugal with a friend and kind of heartbroken because my relationship was not going too well. I bought a really cheap car, some kind of a convertible from other German tourists who were in Portugal. It didn't have a roof at all. It was not street legal. They just cut off this roof and went to Portugal and they needed to get rid of it. I figured out these guys would sell it to me and told my friend, 'Dude, I'm going to France'. He was like, 'What?' He was kind of angry because we were supposed to be on vacation together. So I bought it for very little money and drove for 36 hours straight without sleeping to see my then girlfriend in France. It was a disaster because her dad was a... what do

you call that, a sergeant? And the car didn't have any seat-belts or anything, so she wouldn't sit in the car or go in the car with me. I was there in my big wild-at-heart looking car, and it was kind of a failure.

HOW LONG AGO WAS THIS?

20 something years.

HAVE YOU CALMED DOWN OR WOULD YOU STILL DO SOMETHING THAT CRAZY?

I would still do that, yeah. I have not calmed down – no. That has pluses and minuses.

WILL YOU EXPLORE THOSE PLUSES AND MINUSES IN YOUR FUTURE FILMS?

Yeah. For a long time I thought I had to tame my crazy passion or translate it into something more colourful before it becomes entertainment. In *Victoria* I didn't. It's my fourth film, you know, but it's the first one where it's unabridged. It's not soft around the edges. It has this kind of this raw energy. I was not eyeing a potential audience. I was not asking myself, 'I wonder if people are going to like this?', 'I wonder if this?', 'I wonder if that?' It was only about, 'If I like it, that's what we're going to do. This crazy one take is what we're going to do.' I was not trying to sugarcoat anything to make it go down easier because I also realised, as somebody who watches films or listens to music or reads books, I was just so fed up.

WHY WERE YOU FED UP?

I'm so fed up with people trying to sugarcoat everything for me because they expect me not to be able to take it. Bring it, you know, give it me.

If you sugarcoat things, or if you put ketchup on everything, maybe you're afraid what taste will be left if you take the ketchup away. 'Oh, they won't be able to understand that so I will make it easier for them.' But what that sometimes leads to is you cut the corner off. What are you really made of? What do you really have to tell? If you're worrying so much about selling it or getting it financed and all that, maybe, deep down you're also afraid. Really, at the end of the day, if somebody would come up and give you all the money you need for your project, maybe you're a little afraid of what you've got in yourself?

WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT MOVIES?

You don't watch them with your brain, you don't watch them with your heart, you watch films with your nervous system and you can't escape from it and you can't rationalise it. If you try to rationalise what you've been through with a film you're always going to fail. It will always by far excel what you are able to put into words. But you come out of the cinema and you've loved a film, and you're not sure yet what your friend or partner or whoever you've been there with thinks. I'm always scared that they will hate it because you can't talk them into loving the film or the other way round. I can't be talked into loving a film. If I didn't like it I didn't like it. Even if you both love the film, sometimes the rationalising is a frustrating act. What I love about films is they absolutely work on the level of instinct and intuition and tell you that maybe the core of what we're made of is not this over-rated brain and even sometimes over-rated heart, it's way more complicated 🌀



Midnight Special

Directed by

JEFF NICHOLS

Starring

MICHAEL SHANNON

JOEL EDGERTON

KIRSTEN DUNST

Released

15 APRIL

4

ANTICIPATION.

After Take Shelter and Mud, there's no doubting that Jeff Nichols is the real deal.

4

ENJOYMENT.

A bold and extremely ballsy film that balances gentle moments with bursts of jaw-dropping spectacle.

5

IN RETROSPECT.

Just go and see it, okay?

There comes a point in any successful filmmaker's career when they stop being referred to as 'the next big thing' or 'one to watch' and start becoming known simply by name – their reputation and irrefutable talent rendering such labels obsolete. For Jeff Nichols, that time is surely now. Since announcing himself back in 2007 with *Shotgun Stories*, the Arkansas-born writer/director has quietly established himself as a superlative spinner of dark, deceptively simple yarns that always manage to leave you smiling. His films, which are concerned with the daily anxieties and struggles of ordinary Americans, tend to be concise and unambiguous without being easy to categorise. Yet unlike his debut feature and its equally accomplished follow-ups, 2011's *Take Shelter* and 2012's *Mud*, Nichols' latest at once defies description and exceeds expectation. Which is to say that it builds on the ideas and themes explored in his previous work in strange and surprising ways.

Apparently borrowing its title from the Creedence Clearwater Revival song of the same name, *Midnight Special* sets out its stall as an atmospheric chase movie before revealing itself to be an ambitious supernatural thriller in the spirit of a *Close Encounters*-era Steven Spielberg sci-fi. Principally its focus is the fraught yet tender relationship between working-class father Roy (Michael Shannon) and his unusually gifted eight-year-old son Alton (Jaeden Lieberher), who set a course for an unspecified (and possibly unknown) destination during a suspenseful, near

wordless opening sequence. Beyond that, the film seeks to convey the acrimonious distrust that exists between parochial middle America and the powerful government agencies supposedly acting in the name of liberty and justice for all – both of whom Roy and Alton are desperately trying to evade. And that's as much as we're willing to say.

Aside from the odd bit of casting news, *Midnight Special* has been shrouded in secrecy since filming commenced in early 2014, and indeed it is best to go into the film with as little prior knowledge of the plot and characters as possible. If this review is light on spoilers, however, it's only because attempting to distil the key scenes into a few words would be an utterly futile exercise (a series of exclamatory reaction gifs would be far more illuminating). Nichols is the kind of director who favours the slow burn over the instant payoff, meaning that the high-tension, low-drama manner in which his modern-day parable unfolds makes the third-act fireworks even more dazzling.

Really though, *Midnight Special* is a spectacular reminder that the best films are able to stimulate our imagination while leaving room for a little introspection. The question that provokes the most telling response comes courtesy of Adam Driver's sympathetic government stooge: is this kid a weapon or a saviour? Nichols doesn't provide an answer as such, instead asking us to empathise with the beliefs, fears and prejudices of both sets of antagonists fighting to make sense of something that neither can ever truly understand.

ADAM WOODWARD



Miles Ahead

Directed by

DON CHEADLE

Starring

DON CHEADLE

EWAN MCGREGOR

EMAYATZY CORINEALDI

Released

22 APRIL

4

ANTICIPATION.

Don Cheadle was born to play Miles Davis.

3

ENJOYMENT.

The biopic nuts and bolts are rather more convincing than the increasingly exasperating comedic flights of fancy.

3

IN RETROSPECT.

The ambition is plain to see, but too many false notes impact on the overall achievement.

As someone who started out on the bandstand with Charlie Parker, and closed his career recording with Prince, jazz trumpet legend Miles Davis had plenty to look back on but very little interest in so doing. A guy who never played a greatest-hits set, musically he was always in the now, an ethos making him fundamentally unsuited to the usual A-to-Z Hollywood biopic. Thankfully, Don Cheadle's long-gestating, independently-financed film portrait has no intention of going down that route, and in Cheadle himself has pretty much the only actor alive who might carry off the piercing intelligence and bad-ass mystique Davis himself projected from every record sleeve and live appearance. Anyone who's ever seen him on stage (and your reviewer numbers among them, Glasgow 1990) will attest to being in the presence of, quite simply, a man apart.

Cheadle's movie captures at least some of that. His performance gets the raspy voice, the stare, and the superpimp wardrobe, yet is rich enough to suggest vulnerability behind the jazz gladiator pose. It's certainly a smart choice to situate the bulk of the action in Miles' late '70s Howard Hughes period, when he'd stopped playing and holed up in his New York lair. This gives the narrative legitimate rein to show its subject assailed by past achievements and lost love, while consumed by fears for the future, physical infirmity and a voracious coke habit. Work out what brought him back from the abyss, and maybe you have the key to Miles Davis – a man, after all, whose trademark muted trumpet sound has given generations of listeners access to an all-

enveloping melancholy outlining the very contours of the soul itself.

Davis aficionados will confirm that Cheadle knows his stuff. The music choices are connoisseur smart, and the flashbacks, while offering fairly conventional insights into his curdled relationship with first wife Frances Taylor (a strong showing from Emayatzy Corinealdi) and the racism of an earlier era, are definitely convincing. Which is more than you can say for the '70s nub of the piece, which sets out to probe Davis' dark night of the soul, only to deliver – of all things! – an odd-couple buddy comedy pairing him with Ewan McGregor's fictional scoop-hunting music journo. Certainly, Cheadle eschews the familiar biopic moves, and hence touches on Davis' creative crisis, the moment when he'd seemingly run out of juice. However, the knockabout misadventures, involving a stolen master tape (like Miles only had one copy) and the quest to get high (like Miles Davis can't score his own coke), really don't play at all, and McGregor's be-my-friend role comes across as a wholly unnecessary sop to a mainstream white audience.

Mercifully, Cheadle rallies the troops for a funky musical coda, bringing together Davis' key former bandmates Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter, with today's hipster contingent (*Birdman* drummer Antonio Sanchez, bass queen Esperanza Spalding). This upbeat exit strategy caps a movie that's often as sharp as you'd hope, yet whose weirdly off-key centre stands out like an uncharacteristic cracked note in an otherwise controlled, expressive solo.

TREVOR JOHNSTON



The Pearl Button

Directed by
PATRICIO GUZMÁN
Starring
PATRICIO GUZMÁN
CLAUDIO MERCADO
EMMA MALIG
Released
18 MARCH

5

ANTICIPATION.

*How does one follow up the masterful *Nostalgia For the Light*?*

4

ENJOYMENT.

A sobering, lyrical essay film on Chile's various physical and emotional surface areas.

5

IN RETROSPECT.

Grows in magnitude and importance with each passing day.

Patricio Guzmán's cinema travels through time and space with the seamless ease of a whisper. Humanist and historical, intergalactic and elemental, his films are deceptively dense. One moment could be mired in the trauma of Chile's dictatorial Pinochet era, and the next ascending to the heavens or dipping underneath the water's surface. Malleability remains a crucial component for a filmmaker working so thoroughly in the cross section between national history and personal memory.

After spending *Nostalgia For the Light* stargazing with astronomers and scouring the Atacama Desert looking for the bones of Chile's "disappeared," Guzmán ventures into the lush and isolated terrain of Western Patagonia in *The Pearl Button* to examine the region's relationship with water and its violent history involving displaced indigenous tribes. Striking aerial shots help contextualise the scope of massive estuaries and island chains that reach endlessly outward for thousands of miles. Archival photographs of Patagonia's native tribes segue into a greater discussion about mankind's destructive relationship with the Earth.

Guzmán's calm voiceover often provides a lyrical compliment to the potent imagery. Early in the film he remembers hearing raindrops on a zinc roof while visiting the area many decades before as a child. "That sound has followed me my entire life," he says. The past cannot be shaken, only re-examined and restored with hopes of better understanding what lies beneath. *The Pearl Button* also confronts what it means to be Chilean. Guzmán poses this question to the last living descendants of the Patagonia tribes as well as a selection of poets, engineers, astronomers and artists. Their

knotty answers are organically tied to the compromise of human rights and dignity that has come to define Chilean "progress". Not much differentiates the barbaric acts of settlers decimating native tribes in the 1880s and Pinochet's military dictatorship that came to power through a violent coup d'état in the 1970s. The latter produced a myriad of horrors, including the mass execution of academics, educators, and political allies of deposed President Salvador Allende. One particularly gruesome trend involved attaching steel rails to bodies and dropping them by helicopter into the ocean.

When Guzmán decides to reconstruct the last moments of one such victim, he's combatting the impunity revolving around Pinochet's actions "so the dead can finish dying." *The Pearl Button* intertwines multiple stories hoping to reconcile long-gestating pain with the habit of turning a blind eye to government wrongdoing. Guzman's deep connection with the environment tempers any heavy-handedness, as for him it's about physical details and humbling wonder.

A 3,000-year-old droplet of water lies dormant in a gorgeous piece of quartz. The film's opening image remains a staggering time capsule of endurance, but also embodies the layered texture of time periods in suspended overlap. There are similarly impressive thematic markers throughout *The Pearl Button*, including a map of Chile made by artist Emma Malig on warped cardboard. If "water has its own language," as anthropologist Claudio Mercado says, so too does Guzmán as a filmmaker. His work speaks to the past and present, the living and the dead with equal resolve, lingering on the seemingly small details of memory that allude to so much more. **GLENN HEATH JR**

A person is shown from the back, performing a handstand against a solid blue background. They are wearing a red short-sleeved shirt and white shorts. Their arms are extended downwards, supporting their weight on their hands. Their legs are bent at the knees and held together, with their feet pointing upwards. The person's head is tucked down towards their knees.

IN CINEMAS APRIL 22

HOTLYS | memento | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |





Couple in a Hole

Directed by
TOM GEENS
Starring
PAUL HIGGINS
KATE DICKIE
JÉRÔME KIRCHER
Released
8 APRIL

2

ANTICIPATION.
Hole no!

3

ENJOYMENT.
Hole on...

3

IN RETROSPECT.
A hole lot more interesting than it should be.

Belgian filmmaker Tom Geens' second feature does what it says on the tin; its central characters, John (Paul Higgins) and Karen (Kate Dickie) are a middle-class couple who live – quite literally – in a hole. Somewhere in the Pyrenees, the pair have settled into a comfortable routine; John hunting and foraging, skinning and roasting, while Karen stitches, sews and sleeps. In fact, their peaceful woodland life seems to be going smoothly, except for the fact that Karen can't bring herself to leave the hole. John is patient, massaging his stubborn, fearful wife's out-of-practice joints with attentive tenderness, but his attempts to coax her from the hovel are mostly futile.

Lured out into the open by the promise of rain on her skin and fresh air in her lungs, we finally get a proper look at Karen. While John is sturdy and athletic, she appears to have aged prematurely, her frail body contorted into a permanent, Gollum-like hunch and ravaged by too much time down under. Her excursion is cut short by the arrival of a poisonous spider that bites her, sending her into anaphylactic shock. John is forced out of the forest and into the nearby town in search of medical assistance. It quickly becomes clear that life in the hole is very much a choice rather than a necessity.

Geens is in no hurry to reveal John and Karen's tragic backstory, though with its brisk 105 minutes runtime, the plot unfolds at a languid pace, with ample time taken to establish John and Karen's relationship before bursting the bubble of their insular world. When Andre (Jérôme Kircher), the kindly local pharmacist enters that fray, the

equilibrium of their world is unbalanced. John craves company, and soon the two are fixing Andre's tractor and swapping stories about *saucisson sec* behind Karen's back.

The harshness of life in the wild is tempered by Sam Care's lush cinematography, his camera capturing the countryside's rough beauty – from the misty moon that constantly peeks over the edge of the nearby woodland, to watercolour vistas of the forest that becomes a temporary home for the couple. Still, Geens makes certain never to spare us any gory details; at one point a rabbit is killed and methodically dismembered; then we watch Karen taking a shit. The director's assured hand means that this shifting between tones works for much of the film, helped along no end by a moody electronic score from Bristol-based band BEAK (a side project headed up by Geoff Barrow of Portishead).

It's a shame, then, that the film loses its way in the final stretch. The first two acts honour the gnawing agony of trauma, showing how psychological pain can subsume the lives of those that experience it – and how difficult it can be to wrench back and reclaim that life. Geens treats John and Karen's story with curiosity and kindness; his gaze is intimate rather than anthropological. Yet, stripped-back storytelling is swapped for heavy-handed symbolism in the film's final act, and it's frustrating to see the odd, inviting tone abandoned for something more detached. Still, Geens' knotty, slow-burning meditation on self-preservation is well worth a trip down the rabbit hole. **SIMRAN HANS**



Eddie the Eagle

Directed by
DEXTER FLETCHER
Starring
TARON EGERTON
HUGH JACKMAN
CHRISTOPHER WALKEN
Released
1 APRIL

2

ANTICIPATION.

A film about the greatest loser in sport? It's all downhill from here.

3

ENJOYMENT.

A star-making turn from Egerton commands attention.

2

IN RETROSPECT.

Sticks to the rule-book.

What is it about Dexter Fletcher and the perils and pitfalls of paternity? His latest film as director is *Eddie the Eagle*, an oddly conventional biopic that uses a strained father-son relationship to frame its rabble-rousing, crowd-pleasing reflection on futility. The story is a simple one: notorious ski-jumping loser Eddie Edwards overcomes his lack of talent – and ignores the advice of his disappointed dad – by competing in the 1988 Winter Olympics. Along the way, he picks up a disgruntled drunk of a coach, who becomes a new father figure and unwitting role model, despite suffering from a plethora of daddy issues himself.

Thematically, it feels like the culmination of an increasingly commercial series that explores different facets of fatherhood. Fletcher's directorial debut was the Western-infused gangster parable *Wild Bill* about the fall-out when a gnarly old con makes amends to his sons for years of negligence. He followed that up with the ebullient *Sunshine on Leith*, a middle-class morality musical about a dad fighting for both life and marriage when a family secret threatens to tear everything apart. Families at war, youngsters fleeing the nest, the torment of the past: these are the commonalities in Flexter's work.

Eddie the Eagle ticks off all these tropes, and while it isn't quite as satisfying as those earlier films, there are some entertaining moments, and it brims with hope. The movie chronicles – in a very systematic fashion – the trials and tribulations Edwards faces as he fumbles towards his impossible dream. It does so with absolute gusto,

if not any supreme degree of polish. The plot fits together clunkily, and every single sports movie cliché since the beginning of time (or at least since the beginning of *Rocky*) is dutifully rolled out as if by some kind of contractual obligation.

But a strange and eerie feeling develops as the narrative mechanically edges towards Edwards' shambolic triumph in Calgary: it's a feeling of unexpected joy. There are a couple of key reasons for this: firstly, the ski-jumping sequences really are very well done. Fletcher effectively and economically captures the bone-crunching terror of this most ridiculous of sports, and these scenes are hair-raising, adrenaline-pumping and weirdly euphoric. Audiences with a fear of heights may suffer throughout.

Secondly, there's the terrific, star-making performance of Taron Egerton, who ditches the wide-boy act of *Kingsman: The Secret Service* and delivers an adorably empathetic turn in the title role. There's something of Forrest Gump about the character, both in terms of his determination to beat the odds, and his sheer physicality. Thrillingly, Egerton more than holds his own against a slightly miscast Hugh Jackman, who plays coach Bronson Peary with all the world weariness of a Hollywood star on his way to a power lunch at Spago. Just like his titular hero, Fletcher makes the most of what he's got. In this case, he's got a screenplay brimming with daddy issues, and some very British, end-of-the-pier material that captures the underdog spirit of Eddie and his madcap endeavour, but never quite takes off. His film is sideways step, rather than a giant leap forward. **CHRIS BLOHM**



Our Little Sister

Directed by
HIROKAZU KOREEDA
Starring
SUZU HIROSE
MASAMI NAGASAWA
KAHO
Released
15 APRIL

4

ANTICIPATION.

One of Japan's finest filmmakers returns.

4

ENJOYMENT.

So delicate it sometimes threatens to evaporate in front of your eyes.

4

IN RETROSPECT.

A film that whispers its message, which is nice sometimes.

Perhaps it's just fortuitous timing, but this latest film by Japan's Hirokazu Koreeda could be read as a call for empathy as Europe questions itself over what tabloid newspapers are so bullishly terming the "migrant crisis". The story told in *Our Little Sister* has no literal connection to this real geopolitical event, nor does it contain any direct commentary on it. Yet, in whisking up a subtle drama about the surprise and enrichment that can come from accepting an outsider into a closed family, it happens to be one of those films that has cropped up in the right place and at the right time.

Three sisters make their way across the country to attend the funeral of their estranged father. He chose to shack up with another woman and bore another daughter – the sprightly yet demure teenager Suzu (Suzu Hirose) – with whom the sisters have no real kinship. Though brisk and even a little awkward, the service offers enough time for a connection to form between Suzu and the sisters, and when Suzu's comically ostentatious grande dame mother enters the equation, their ensuing union is cemented.

From this set-up, there's little in terms of a narrative sweep. Instead, Koreeda simply gathers up pertinent details and allows each character to blossom naturally. The situation is the story, and the process of how these women live with one another is the source of the film's compassion and tranquil humour. Though Suzu is physically the youngest of this feisty coven, her somewhat sheltered upbringing has allowed her to become wise to certain household quandaries, and her purity means that she's a dab hand when it comes to helping her sisters with

their various romantic and professional foibles. Light bickering often takes over, but only as a way to consolidate the sisters' essential camaraderie and mutual love for one another.

Though the film never hits any pointedly dark notes, an undercurrent of sorrow remains discernible throughout, particularly as Suzu takes to analysing the fragility of her current state of happiness. Having been wholeheartedly accepted into this divine sisterhood, she fears that her newfound contentment is transitory – that it may come to a bitter end. Guilt regarding her father's romantic inclinations begins to manifest, and the film takes on a new, emotionally complex dimension. Not content with basking in the joy of domestic harmony, Koreeda explores the nature of family ties, and asks whether it's possible to predict how the actions of one person can directly effect the life-path of another.

It's become something of a cliché to compare Koreeda to Japanese maestro, Yasujiro Ozu, a director who dedicated a life's work to untangling the emotional knots formed by life inside and outside of a family. And though *My Little Sister* lacks the breathtaking rigour of the typical Ozu picture, the resemblance in aura of their work feels more than superficial. Not least because Koreeda seems to be setting into a grove of intimate family dramas, following his sublime *Still Walking* from 2008, and the sentimental adoption mix-up comedy from 2013, *Like Father, Like Son*. This new film is about acceptance, responsibility and how families should always be ready to make room for one more.

DAVID JENKINS



Hirokazu Koreeda

One of Japan's best directors tells us about adapting manga and mimicking Ozu.

Hirokazu Koreeda is a filmmaker fixated by what happens when families fall apart and then rebuild. As far back as 2004's breakthrough, *Nobody Knows*, we saw a group of young kids take on maternal roles when their mother randomly leaves them to fend for themselves. Now, in this latest movie, the disarmingly gentle *Our Little Sister*, a young girl is united with a trio of step-sisters from her father's previous marriage. The film is an adaptation of a manga serial by artist Akimi Yoshida.

LWLIES: WHEN YOU'RE READING BOOKS OR MANGA, ARE YOU ALWAYS THINKING ABOUT WHETHER THE STORY CAN BE MADE INTO A MOVIE?

No, not at all. I don't normally adapt from original stories. I do read a lot. I am a fan of Haruki Murakami and Kazuo Ishiguro, of course. Akimi Yoshida, who wrote this manga, is someone I've been a fan of for a long time. When I read it, I instantly felt like I really wanted to turn it into a film.

DOES THE VISUAL FORM OF MANGA INSPIRE THE WAY THE FILM WAS MADE?

The original author is from Kamakura, so she knows the place where she grew up. I tried to be as faithful as possible to that. The way the cartoons are drawn are not very uniform. The cells are different sizes and different angles so they don't translate directly to the screen. I've seen people who work from original manga and try to make it into film and it just doesn't work. So you can't copy the original.

HOW DID YOU DISCOVER THE BIG HOUSE THAT THE SISTERS LIVE IN?

Rather than having a set, I wanted to find a real house. There are not many really old houses that exist in Japan any more, so it was miraculous that we found this one. A very elderly couple lived there. Every time we had to film we asked them to move into a little apartment. It was pure coincidence that the wife of the couple used to work for one of Japan's major movie magazines. She was an editor there, so that was very lucky. There was a time where I thought we couldn't find the right house and that we would have to build a set. But the garden with the veranda and all the seasonal flowers and the plum tree... you could never re-create that on a set.

WHAT DO YOU DO ON THE FIRST DAY WHEN YOU START A NEW SCRIPT?

I carry a notebook all the time and I always jot ideas down whenever I have them. There is actually an old inn in Chigasaki, by the seaside, where Yasujiro Ozu and his co-screenwriter, Kogo Noda, used to shut themselves in and

write their films. It's the place where they wrote *Tokyo Story*. For six months they would just drink and write. But the room they would always use is still there, and when I'm thinking about a screenplay, I always go there. It's actually right next to Shochiku Film Studio so a lot of their in-house directors were made to go there to write their scripts. Now, there doesn't seem to be as many. Aside for myself, there's a female director called Miwa Nishikawa who goes there.

WHEN YOU'VE FINISHED THE FIRST DRAFT OF A SCREENPLAY, WHO'S THE FIRST PERSON YOU GIVE IT TO FOR FEEDBACK?

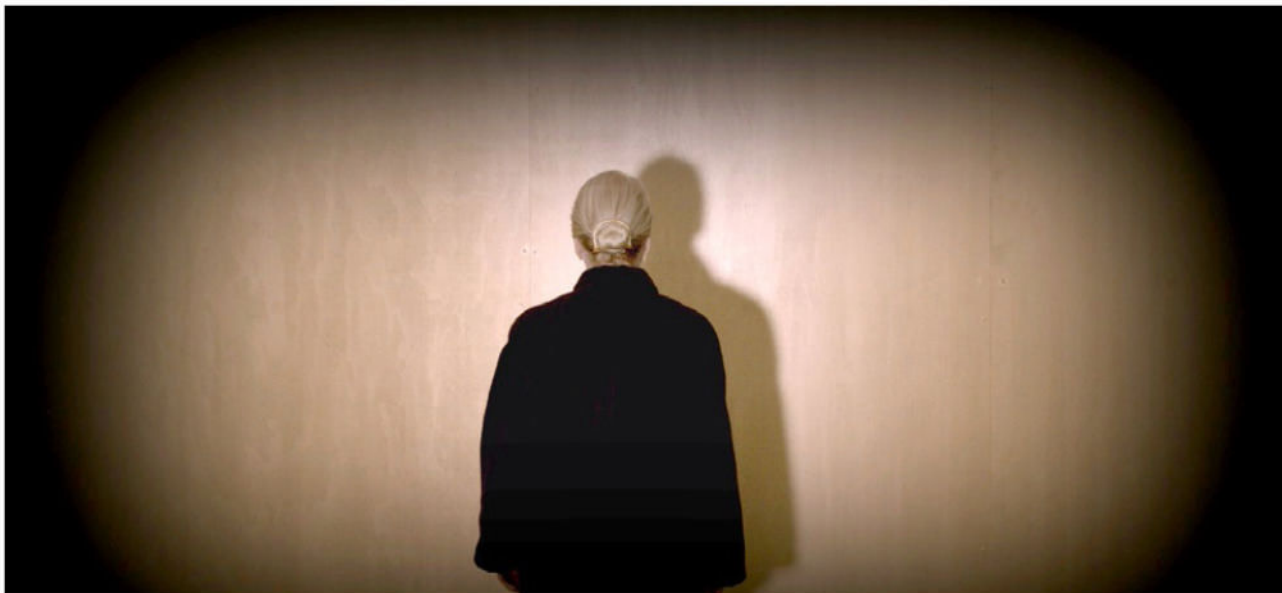
I usually give it to Miwa Nishikawa to look at. For this one, what she told me that two of the characters were very similar, when they become very close, I had to stress the point at which they become close.

THIS MOVIE RELATES TO YOUR PREVIOUS FILM, LIKE FATHER LIKE SON, IN THAT IT EXPLORES FAMILIES BEING CREATED FROM PARTS OF OTHER FAMILIES. IS THIS AN OBSESSION?

To be honest, I wasn't aware of this connection. But I've actually writing a new film script just on the aeroplane to London and I realised, this is another film about characters who are forced into a family.

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN LOOKING AT HOW FAMILY EFFECTS INDIVIDUALS?

Not really. There's nothing particular I'm trying to portray. I think families are priceless but troublesome. I try and make films that get both sides of that across 🍷



I Am Belfast

Directed by

MARK COUSINS

Starring

HELENA BEREEN

MARK COUSINS

**THE CREATURE FROM THE
BLACK LAGOON**

Released

8 APRIL

2

ANTICIPATION.

Set whimsy-tolerance levels to high.

4

ENJOYMENT.

On the verge of laughter at the beginning, on the verge of tears by the end.

4

IN RETROSPECT.

A complex and heartfelt evocation of a divided city.

The most whimsically audacious move by Mark Cousins in a career fuelled by whimsical audacity is the casting of a serene old woman as the city of Belfast. *I Am Belfast* is part documentary poem rooted in the abstract, and part its writer/director's specific attempt to make sense of the birthplace that he fled decades ago. Peach-clad Helena Berreen walks the streets of Belfast with an air of studied contemplation while, in voice-over, she speaks lyrical lines. Sometimes she monologues, at others times she is in conversation with Cousins.

The pair begin by expressing childlike admiration for colours and structures. They find art within everyday settings, noting the relationship between charcoal streets and purple skies, observing the serendipitous synchronicity between paint on manmade surfaces and the clothes of passers-by. Rothko paintings are referenced and so are rousing words by Eleanor Roosevelt. This audiovisual commentary is evocative, but connecting with the film's goal of giving ordinary life the mystery and magic of cinema requires an abandonment of cynicism that may prompt internal struggle. Without audience cooperation, the old lady seems like a dreamer drifting through the urban landscape talking to her imaginary friend.

At about the 30 minute mark, the focus shifts to the bigger, deeper, sadder, more historic picture. "I could soften the story," says Old Lady Belfast, "Don't soften the story," replies Cousins. Hard facts materialise. Between 1971 and 1991, Belfast's population shrank from 400,000 to 281,000. "119,000 people gave up on me". "I was one of them," admits

Cousins. "If I could have run I would have," counter-admits Belfast. Their whimsical verbal dance has pirouetted into deep waters in one bold and fleet-footed move. Archive footage illustrates 'The Troubles', but this film isn't about lingering in the past as much as tracing its effect to the present. The narrative refocuses on cultural regeneration and the diverse ethnic groups that have brought new hope to the city, except the tone is now more complex. In the same breath that the pair celebrate progress, they lament the Catholic/Protestant divide that now physically manifests in walls throughout the city.

By now it is movingly self-evident that using a gentle current of inquisitive observations, Cousins has swept himself and Lady Belfast into a picture about a highly complex reality. It is all the more powerful because the brush and the canvas come from his singular imagination. Helena Berreen still looks serene in pink, but the details that she observes are stark. The film evokes the legacy of social disharmony, using *The Creature From The Black Lagoon* to illustrate that the surface may seem tranquil but below hatred and tension still lurk, ready to drag anyone down.

Letting Mark Cousins sweeps you up in his elaborate but considered perspective of Belfast may cause feet to leave the ground. It's worth letting this happen as the view where he floats is sublimely perceptive. The film reaches a crescendo with two visual metaphors that use everyday imagery to symbolise massive progress. The wider significance of these two narrative peaks is questionable but Cousins' sincerity is absolute and very moving.

SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN



Demolition

Directed by
JEAN-MARC VALLÉE
Starring
JAKE GYLLENHAAL
NAOMI WATTS
CHRIS COOPER
Released
29 APRIL

3

ANTICIPATION.

Vallée is an underrated director of alternative crowdpleasers.

4

ENJOYMENT.

A moving account of how the process of grief can take on strange forms.

3

IN RETROSPECT.

Helped no end by a charming, laid-back central performance from Gyllenhaal.

Investment banker Davis Mitchell (Jake Gyllenhaal) is driving along with his wife, Julia (Heather Lind). They're in the midst a mundane conversation about home appliances. All of a sudden a car crashes into them, killing Julia. The credits follow, and the word 'Demolition' appears on screen. It's a shocking gesture: we're introduced to a character, then they're instantly killed. The scene finds its precedent in some of the director Jean-Marc Vallée's other openings: a dropped child in 2005's *C.R.A.Z.Y.*; AIDS activist Ron Woodroof fainting in 2013's *Dallas Buyers Club*; and Cheryl Strayed ripping off her toenail in 2014's *Wild*. Vallée's cinema usually begins with trauma. But what's different in *Demolition* is that the violence doesn't directly affect the hero.

Based on a script by Bryan Sipe, Vallée chooses to film the crash from inside the car, devastating Davis and the audience, and then smoothly transitioning to the title. It should be abject: transforming the loss of a human life into an audience shock. But this cynical jibe would come to parallel Davis' own character arc throughout the film as he slowly learns to feel again. After the death of his wife, everyone surrounding him, especially his father-in-law Phil (Chris Cooper), is stricken by grief, while Davis continues going to work as if nothing has even happened. Davis tries to justify his behaviour in a long-winded letter to a vending machine customer service representative, Karen (Naomi Watts), who becomes sympathetic to his plight. All the while Davis starts acting bizarrely at work, alienating himself from his

peers and extended family by choosing to demolish his home and everything that reminds him of Julia.

Davis' process of self-realisation inevitably takes him to some dark places. He slowly starts to evolve, and through opening himself up to the emotional pain of others, he is able to rebuild his fractured life. Vallée, with his regular cinematographer Yves Bélanger, captures the movement of the actors and landscapes with a musical rhythm, which dovetails nicely with a jam session between Karen's son Chris and Davis that spreads wide across the city. Compared to his other work, *Demolition* is edited with a lot more snap and style. The subject matter could be seen as deeply maudlin, and so this sprightly, vivacious formal treatment reflects Davis' own unconventional reaction to his situation.

During this period of intense focus on dismantling and restoring physical objects, Davis happens across a decommissioned carousel while wandering along the New York waterfront. His rehabilitation is capped off with a climactic scene of unbridled happiness as this dusty carnival relic is brought back from the doldrums. After so much misery, the film assures us that a beacon of light can always be found when the world appears to be turning to rubble. With TV serial *Big Little Lies* coming up and after that a potential Janis Joplin biopic in the offing, Vallée proves he is committed to a heartfelt and personal popular cinema that speaks to the contemporary times. If he chooses to remain a more anonymous and modest public figure, then so be it. **DAVID DAVIDSON**



The Club

Directed by
PABLO LARRAIN
Starring
ALFREDO CASTRO
ANTONIA ZEGERS
MARCELO ALONSO
Released
25 MARCH

4

ANTICIPATION.

Pablo Larrain can lead us anywhere.

4

ENJOYMENT.

Horrible, but compellingly so:

4

IN RETROSPECT.

A perfect example of cinema's capacity to confront evil.

Chilean director Pablo Larrain led us so deeply into darkness with the blackly comic one-two punch of *Tony Manero* and *Post Mortem*, that his previous feature, *No*, the story of the advertising campaign to oust Pinochet, almost felt like light relief. With his new film, *The Club*, he returns to the embrace the gloom once more, with a film that makes for a fascinating and contrasting companion piece to the recent *Spotlight* as it illuminates sexual abuses and corruption within the Catholic church in scathing satirical style.

Located in grim Chilean fishing town La Boca, Larrain's fifth feature takes us inside a treatment house for variously disgraced clergymen similar to the one depicted in *Spotlight* as merely an ominous exterior. It houses four priests: Fathers Vidal, Ortega, Ramirez and Silva (played by Alfredo Castro, Alejandro Goic, Alejandro Sieveking and Jaime Vadell) and an ex-nun, Mónica (a chilling Antonia Zegers), who acts as warden. She's supposed to ensure that their focus remains unremittingly on penitence, but the group have been indulging in a frivolous, prohibited activity by raising a greyhound and entering him into local races.

This cushy existence is thrown into chaos when the arrival of new priest Father Lazcano (José Soza) attracts a dishevelled accuser Sandokan (Roberto Farias), who taunts the group with graphic descriptions of his abuse at the hands of Lazcano and others. This leads to a violent act which brings forth spiritual director and psychologist Father Garcia (Marcelo Alonso). This handsome, rather intense moderniser is visibly appalled by what he finds and

he challenges the residents with details of their crimes, putting each of them under his unforgiving microscope, with the film doing likewise.

Under the simultaneous scrutiny of Larrain's regular cinematographer Sergio Armstrong, the characters morph into twisted physical grotesques that fit with their hideous crimes and general remorselessness. Yet the film's washed-out, melancholic look also has the effect of dulling the group's villainy so that they often appear pathetically, sometimes humorously human as they bunch nervously together, balk at Father Garcia's accusations and his suggestion that they might be criminals, cower from the ugly truths that Sandokan hollers from the street, and as Father Vidal makes cringing attempts to ingratiate himself to a group of young surfers.

Like Sandokan, *The Club* takes a bravely head-on, but hardly obvious, approach to the subject matter; it may be a marvel of visual character, with a dramatic score that gives it the flavour of a tragedy, but it's certainly not pretty in a thematic sense, with the brutal, relentlessly explicit dialogue (from Larrain and co-writers Guillermo Calderón and Daniel Villalobos) an acknowledgement that we've got to fully recognise the difficult-to-hear issue of child abuse, in order to stop the perpetrators slipping back into the safety of the shadows. It has plenty to say to a church that effectively and repeatedly ignores the problem, harbouring its transgressors only just out of sight, and to the reformers who may be all talk. By virtue of its courage *The Club* renders itself essential.

EMMA SIMMONDS



LITTLE WHITE LIES



FILMUFORIA



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THE UPCOMING

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TUNDE ADEBIMPE

NASTY BABY

A FILM BY
SEBASTIÁN SILVA

TBC Certification TBC

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FUNNY IN ITS OWN
OFF-KILTER WAY"
VARIETY

IN CINEMAS
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Eye In the Sky

Directed by
GAVIN HOOD
Starring
HELEN MIRREN
AARON PAUL
ALAN RICKMAN
Released
8 APRIL

2

ANTICIPATION.

To drone or not to drone, that is the question.

3

ENJOYMENT.

A basic conundrum; yet it's smart, tense, and surprisingly pointed.

3

IN RETROSPECT.

A last reminder of what made Alan Rickman such a gift to cinema.

“Never tell a soldier the cost of war.” These are the parting words from Alan Rickman’s Lieutenant General Frank Benson in Gavin Hood’s *Eye In The Sky*. It’s a role that was to become the actor’s last. It’s “cost” we think of now, as we grieve his death. The kind of cost we face when, to become immortalised on the big screen, we must face our own impermanence. Movies create two selves: one human, one untouchable. Sometimes you have to allow the former to fade so the latter may thrive. In this last sight of him, we see those two selves part ways; leaving behind one who walks, talks and smiles for an eternity.

Though *Eye in the Sky* might be considered an unremarkable fragment of his screen legacy, Rickman comes across here as his own essence, like the final refinement of all those qualities which inhabit his celluloid self. It’s an exploration into the weight of responsibility in times of war, and it’s a burden that rests so visibly upon Rickman’s shoulders. Here, his mediator Benson sits wedged in between Helen Mirren’s forceful military Colonel and a board of governmental authorities tasked with the ultimate decision: whether or not to order the drone hovering above an East Kenyan house to drop its payload on a gathering of East Africa’s most wanted, even though it would spell death for the young girl in the yard next door, her candy-striped hula hoop spinning gracefully around her as she plays.

This is warfare reduced to one basic dilemma: do you kill an innocent to save the lives of

countless others? Or do you wait patiently for the right moment to reveal itself? As the stakes become clearer, the tension slowly cranks and the sweat pours, as politicians stuffed away in a London cabinet room play hot potato with the onus of responsibility. War will always spill the blood of the innocent, but it’s the blood on your own hands that plagues sleepless nights.

Yet, Benson’s face speaks its own kind of truth. What elevates *Eye in the Sky* above the tortuous pitfalls of moral didactics sits within the expression that washes over his face as he watches those politicians rally responsibility around the room as if it were a panicked game of badminton. His furrowed brow and heavy sighs betray his weariness, his frustration. But also a small, wry look of quiet bemusement. It feels like only Rickman could meld those wildly opposing sentiments into a single expression, only he could hold such delicate appreciation that absurdity is never too far behind tragedy. Sometimes, even, he seems as if he watches the world from a step back, witnessing and revelling in all its glorious contradictions.

Eye in the Sky is a textbook narrative exercise. So textbook, in fact, that the old gem of an Aeschylus quote opens the film: “In war, truth is the first casualty”. It’s the kind of overwrought wisdom that now usually graces the loading screens of video games. Yet, as Rickman’s droll smirks unroll on screen, we start to see a film slowly revealing its hidden knowledge of those strange mechanics of existence. **CLARISSE LOUGHREY**



The Brand New Testament

Directed by
JACO VAN DORMAEL
Starring
PILI GROYNÉ
BENOÎT POELVOORDE
CATHERINE DENEUVE
Released
25 MARCH

3

ANTICIPATION.

Belgian comedy is often hit-or-miss, sometimes worth to risk two hours of your time.

2

ENJOYMENT.

Time passes slowly and fades away and 'love' definitely isn't 'loving'.

2

IN RETROSPECT.

Do not waste the unknown number of hours of life you have left on incoherent schmaltz.

The various depressing global events which coloured the end of 2015 and the beginning of 2016, added to the the unusual frequency with which beloved celebrities have been dying, could truly make anyone take the premise of *The Brand New Testament* very seriously indeed. Maybe the reason why this world often seems cruel is that God himself – supposing he exists – is a bitter and selfish man.

In Jaco Van Dormael's film, God takes the shape of actor Benoît Poelvoorde, whose customary screams, eruptions of violence and brash dynamism are employed here to the full. For undisclosed reasons, God lives in Brussels with his shy and quiet wife and their daughter Ea (Pili Groyne), who begins to follow in the rebellious footsteps of her brother, JC (David Murgia). One day, tired of His inhumanity, she finally decides to enter her dad's private room. Using the computer with which He controls the world, Ea decides to reveal to every human being their date of death via text message. If one can accept the very ordinary world so far established, the effects of Ea's action mark the beginning of the film's downward spiral into the irritating and the incoherent.

Ea's intention when sending these fateful texts only becomes clear when her brother JC states it himself and his predictions are confirmed. Knowing the exact moment of their death, people lose faith in God and decide to act according only to their desires. However, one could imagine another version of the script where, knowing how short a time they have before Judgment Day, people would

become extremely devout and thus empower this God, however severe He may have been. It is naturally pointless to criticise a film based on what it does not do rather than on what it does, but the chain of events triggered by Ea never quite convinces and thus proceeds on shaky foundations.

The Brand New Testament relies on that typically Belgian hybrid of tones, where bleakness and violence are contrasted with syrupy sentimentalism. The latter progressively dominates the film, and with mixed results, as Ea goes in search of the six mortals she has chosen to add to the existing 12 apostles. These characters come from drastically different walks of life and each story of rediscovery in the face of death is presented as a new gospel. Their meanings, however, are not as distinct as the protagonists themselves. The progressive intersection of their stories could have been constructive and powerful had Van Dormael not chosen to promote a defensible yet simplifying and muddled romanticism. His good intentions limit his scope to the Power of Love instead of widening it to the entire spectrum of the human experience.

The epilogue further undermines the persuasiveness and credibility of the director's good heart. Suddenly, touches of utopian and fantastic feminism, environmentalism (more precisely, tolerated inter-species romance) and rightful drastic punishment appear as last minute flourishes rather than central concerns. Humanity will have to wait if it wants another, more credible Testament.

MANUELA LAZIC



The Here After

Directed by
MAGNUS VON HORN
Starring
ULRIK MUNTHER
MATS BLOMGREN
LOA EK
Released
11 MARCH

3

ANTICIPATION.

This low-key Swedish drama picked up plenty of plaudits on the European festival circuit.

4

ENJOYMENT.

An accomplished, atmospheric debut feature.

3

IN RETROSPECT.

Excited to see what both director and star do next.

At a time when compelling true-crime dramas like *Spotlight*, TV's *Making a Murderer* and NPR's *Serial* podcast are keeping water coolers everywhere well-stocked, it feels odd to suddenly put yourself in the shoes of someone who is unequivocally guilty of committing a terrible act. That's the set-up for Swedish writer/director Magnus von Horn's impressive debut feature, *The Here After*, which centres around a young offender's reintegration into a close-knit rural community that's not yet ready to forgive and forget. Which is understandable, given the grisly nature of the tragic event in question.

When we first meet John (Ulrik Munther) he doesn't seem the wrongful type. He's placid and quiet, but not in the way an unsuspecting neighbour might presuppose when speaking to a local TV news crew. Could it be that this is what made him so dangerous in the first place? Is there really a monster lurking behind the unassuming blond-haired, blue-eyed exterior? Not exactly. As a director, von Horn is smart enough to recognise that even the most heinous crimes have a human culprit, and as such his sensitive, unsensational film retains a sense of poise and never strays into soap opera territory. Nor is the film guilty of trashy blood hectoring, which wasn't the case with Thomas Vinterberg's crudely manipulative 2011 drama, *The Hunt*, to which *The Here After* bears only a superficial likeness.

If there's a downside to von Horn's approach, it's that framing the story from the perpetrator's point of view relegates the real victim to the

sidelines. Which is not to say that her presence isn't felt – the entire town is cast in a cold, eerie shadow, its residents haunted by the twin spectres of anger and fear so eloquently characterised by the stark cinematography of Lukasz Zal (who previously lensed Pawel Pawlikowski's Oscar-winning, monochrome masterpiece, from 2013 *Ida*). Likewise, it's made clear from the very start that John, despite being out of prison, will never be released from the feeling of remorse that constantly hangs over him.

And while John just wants to move on with his life, his peers are quick to remind him of the one he destroyed. Initially John receives only mild taunts upon returning to his former school, but his increasingly confused and frustrated classmates soon conspire to carry out a more hostile form of retribution. Crucially, John never retaliates, accepting his ostracisation before eventually finding solace in new girl Malin (Loa Ek), who helps to shade in John's backstory by asking the questions no one else dare.

Though punctuated by moments of taut conflict, the restraint of von Horn's direction creates a lasting dramatic tension that is epitomised by 21-year-old pop star-turned-actor Ulrik Munther (think Sweden's answer to Ed Sheeran), who deserves huge credit for his understated central turn. This is a film that poses both difficult and vital questions about how compassion and tolerance are exercised on a societal level, without ever asking us to pass moral judgement on any of its characters.

ADAM WOODWARD



Hitchcock / Truffaut

Directed by

KENT JONES

Starring

MARTIN SCORSESE

WES ANDERSON

JAMES GRAY

Released

4 MARCH

4

ANTICIPATION.

One of the great critics of our time with a stellar grouping of world-class filmmakers.

3

ENJOYMENT.

It's hard not to be infectiously drawn in by the passion on display here.

3

IN RETROSPECT.

More of a beginner's guide than an invaluable contribution to the subject.

François Truffaut's interview compendium 'Hitchcock/Truffaut' may very well be the most sacred and beloved text in all cinephilia, and certainly the most significant for the cause of the auteur theory along with Andrew Sarris' 'The American Cinema'. Published in 1967, this singular volume was based on a week-long interview Truffaut conducted with Alfred Hitchcock in 1962. It isn't just an invaluable in-depth study of one of cinema's greatest masters, it's also an incredible text about two artists who simply admired each other. As with Peter Bogdanovich's 'This Is Orson Welles', many of the book's most memorable moments derive not simply from the privileged insights into a filmmaker's method, but from the pleasure and excitement of two passionate people bouncing ideas across a table.

Now, acclaimed programmer, critic, and filmmaker Kent Jones has pulled off the tricky feat of finding a way to do justice to the book and bring its pages alive in a new documentary that is less an adaptation more than it is a tribute. It would be difficult to bring this conversational dynamic to life on film, and it would be too easy to compile the book's greatest hits into a series of sound-bites punched up with behind-the-scenes tidbits. Instead, in his *Hitchcock/Truffaut*, Jones pays homage to the spirit of his film's namesake by mining the passion at the book's core and then choosing to expand the conversation. Enlisting a slew of chatty cineastes to offer their own thoughts and feelings on the book and Hitchcock's work,

Jones, and co-writer Serge Toubiana have made not so much *Hitchcock/Truffaut* as *Hitchcock/Truffaut/Scorsese/Assayas/Gray/Desplechin/Fincher/Kurosawa*. Jones' film is an endearing portrait of filmmaker-to-filmmaker adoration that brings Truffaut's landmark book into the present, making its fascinating dialogue feel continuous, fresh and alive.

The actor and director Bob Balaban narrates the film, and while his endearing tones make a sound choice for any voiceover gig, it could have perhaps benefitted more from the personal touch of Jones' considerable eloquence. The doc circles around its subject, only just skimming the surface of the wealth of insight the source material offers. One passage on 1958's *Vertigo* is the highlight – it seems to draw the whole focus of the movie into its mesmerising vortex, and becomes the central topic of discussion among the interviewees. Most movingly, Martin Scorsese speaks about its impact on a personal level. However, the brilliance of *Vertigo* notwithstanding, it seems unfair for one film to hog so much screen time in a piece that is ostensibly supposed to be about a book as comprehensive as 'Hitchcock/Truffaut'. The deep analysis one may expect from Jones is lacking here, and one can find more incisive work from him on the very same subject, for example, in the supplements of The Criterion Collection's release of Truffaut's *The Soft Skin*. There is the feeling that he may be using the film to introduce the book to a younger generation of cinephiles. But there's no denying the pleasure of wallowing in the presence of such movie love.

ADAM COOK



Louder Than Bombs

Directed by

JOACHIM TRIER

Starring

JESSE EISENBERG

ISABELLE HUPPERT

GABRIEL BYRNE

Released

22 APRIL

4

ANTICIPATION.

Very high hopes resting on this one.

4

ENJOYMENT.

Tells a familiar story in a new and vital way.

4

IN RETROSPECT.

Like all good films, this one is built for repeat viewings.

The leap in quality between Joachim Trier's stellar directorial debut *Reprise* and its even-more-stellar follow-up *Oslo, 31 August* was, in a word, giant. Where we are with his latest film (and first in the English language) is a big step to the side, and a small shuffle backwards. But where those first two films landed swift and hard punches to the gut, *Louder Than Bombs* opts for death by a thousand small, incisive cuts.

Casting chronological story-telling aside, the film depicts a middle class family during a period of unpredictable grief following the death of matriarch Isabelle (Isabelle Huppert). The act of mourning is usually associated with stillness and contemplation, yet this is not the case with her two sons Jonah (Jesse Eisenberg) and Conrad (David Druid). The pair gravitate towards impulsive, possibly irrational behaviour. Even though he's just become a father, Jonah uses a trip back at the family ranch to tomtocat around with ex-flames, while school-aged Conrad takes questionable measures to score with the cheerleader of his dreams. Father Gene (Gabriel Byrne) is desperate to make some kind of sense of the situation. A posthumous gallery exhibition of his late wife's work as a war photographer certainly isn't making matters any easier.

It's a scenario that heaves with the potential for slushy melodrama, but Trier and trusty co-writer Eskil Vogt never go there. Instead they just follow the characters on a meandering (and sometimes intersecting) path of confusion and disillusionment. And if that all sounds like as

much fun as a swiftly-swung slipper to the keister, rest assured that it's all pieced together with such precision, discernment and dry humour that the taxing process of unpacking the film means that it sits long in the mind. Per the Smiths-referencing title, the film is itself an emotional blast zone, suggesting that while the moment of the explosion itself may cause the most physical pain, it's the bloody aftermath that will be felt for years to come.

The relationship between the father and his two sons also avoids cliché by not weighing down characters with familiar roles. There's no-one keeping a cool head, and there's also no-one who's visibly melting down. Jonah, whose sense of maturity is spurred on by his newfound paternal responsibilities, ends up being crippled by arrogance. He reads his dad's sadness as a sign of weakness, and so decides to assume responsibility for the family's public affairs – a job for which he's woefully under-qualified. Conrad finds solace in online gaming, which for a time feels like an overly obvious metaphor for social retreat. Though at least Trier and Vogt have a charming punchline stashed up their sleeve.

If, in there end, the film may leave you tinged with disappointment, it's only because Trier had set such a high bar for himself. Props to him for not rolling out *New York, 31 August* like most would've wanted him to. And props to him for refusing to use this opportunity to reach a wider audience as a way to dumb down his ideas and his erudite, poetic mode of delivering them. This is a hefty, thoughtful package, a film to live with for a while. **DAVID JENKINS**



Joachim Trier

The director of *Louder Than Bombs* talks through the intricacies of his writing process.

Eskil Vogt is my writing partner. When we start on a new project, we talk for a year. We're just sat in a room and we take lots of notes. Eskil does the physical writing. He also comes up with suggestions, and then I'll give him notes. He does final touches on all the writing. He's great at that. It's my responsibility to decide what this is and whether I would like to spend a few years making it. Eskil is fantastically open. He's a great guy to sit in a room with. We talk about other movies too. Why is *Don't Look Now* the formal masterpiece that it is? And then we go back to our story and think, fuck, we should do some more inter-cutting like Nicolas Roeg does! We share a lot of stories from our own lives with each other. I know his family and he knows mine. We have a lot of the same friends. So it's a really nice space for an honest conversation where 90 per cent of the ideas are shit, but the remaining ten we put in the script.

It could be that this formal idea of using voiceover is lying around, and at some point we know that we're making a story about grief and

the mother, so we use that voiceover in a scene where a character is thinking about his mother. We ask, did that fit together? Yes, it clicks. And that's where I think my collaboration with Eskil is at its best, as we seldom disagree when things work. Drafting is important. When we have a draft, we sit down, turn off our phones, and then read it through in one go while sat in separate rooms. It's to get a sense of the timing. We take notes, and then we meet. Those days are important. You're nervous, you get up and you drink a coffee. We've printed things out the night before. We arrive, say hello, and that's it. We used to do this process in one another's homes, but now we do it in an office. Maybe we're growing up too fast? I heard a rumour that David Lynch wrote all of *Twin Peaks* in the same coffee shop where he drank 50 cups of coffee a day and got into a sugar rush.

It's a weird process. One week you think you're making a masterpiece, and the next you're throwing it in the bin. It's up and down. I read that Philip Roth – who was very prolific – said that he has this little metaphorical bird in his hand, and this represents an idea. He looks at the bird and wonders whether it will fly. Or will it die in his hand? Eskil and I always hope that the process will get easier, but it never does. It's just the same. You have these ideas, but you have to wrestle with them. The two areas where I think we've got better is understanding when we have something. We have more ideas where we think, 'right, this whole thing could be a film'. We have gotten better at physically writing stuff. When we did *Oslo, 31 August* we didn't have as much time, so Eskil would write on his own and send stuff to me. This was after

we had that long talking period of going through the structure.

There's another thing we do where we try to understand the whole film temporally. We put up a centimetre ruler up on the wall and one centimetre is one page of the script. It's not just lots of yellow Post-it notes where one tiny scene is the same as the big set piece. We can actually see the proportions of the film. And if you use different colour-codings for the characters, you really get a good sense of who you're spending the most time with. You can see if you're favouring one character over another. Or even when there's a long gap between being with a certain character. We have a proportional way of looking at it. When you're editing the film, you shrink the timeline. When you're writing a script you can learn a lot from editing. I remember reading the script through one day listening to a certain album. There was also a guy I knew who watched a rough cut of his film through a keyhole just to get a different perspective on it. We use a lot of consultants also. We screen it a lot. I have final cut, so no-one is going to fuck around with it, but I do take on advice. What I've learned is that some things have to be absolutely understood for other things to be ambiguous. If you don't get that balance right, you're making awful art. myself and my co-writer Eskil and I have plenty of ideas regarding films we want to do. But it's also about choosing which one. We now know how tough it is to make movies. It takes something out of you every time. I don't want to sound pretentious about it, but it's true. I think it's good to embrace naiveté. I think it's amazing that we were able to make an experimental film with these actors 🍷



Nasty Baby

Directed by
SEBASTIÁN SILVA
Starring
SEBASTIÁN SILVA
TUNDE ADEBIMPE
KRISTEN WIIG
Released
8 APRIL

3

ANTICIPATION.

Obsessed with the title.

5

ENJOYMENT.

Wears its brilliant social observations lightly and enjoyably and then with shocking audacity.

5

IN RETROSPECT.

This baby should be discussed and dissected in groups of great minds.

“Not having answers is a new way of living for me,” said Sebastián Silva, *Nasty Baby*’s writer, director and lead actor during a screening introduction at the 2015 Berlin Film Festival. These words chime perfectly with a film that weaves the social tapestry of likeable, progressive people in a way that feels complex but celebratory, until the rug is pulled from under everything, turning the film from a breezy queer drama into a casual modern masterpiece.

The setting is bohemian New York and the camera rushes after energetic characters as they pursue goals of making art and creating life. Freddy (Sebastián Silva), Mo (Tunde Adebimpe) and Polly (Kristen Wiig) are trying for a baby. Freddy is an artist. As penance for self-diagnosed narcissism at ignoring the babies that need adopting in order to make one of his own, he wants to humiliate himself by impersonating a baby in a gallery installation called ‘Nasty Baby’. A curator is interested but may just want to see Freddy naked and vulnerable. The roaming camera is adept at catching the suggestion of competing psychological interests before words are chosen and positions committed to.

Polly (played with verve by Kristin Wiig) has bad news. Freddy’s sperm count is too low to impregnate her. They ask his boyfriend Mo to step up to the jizz jar. Mo is played by the affable Tunde Adebimpe (from band TV on the Radio). He is the calm relationship centre, for Freddy is prone to anger and comes close to lashing out at The Bishop (Reg E Cathey), a mentally ill, temperamentally

volatile man who roams their street. Mo speaks in the comically resigned tones of someone forced by a partner to learn the language of emotional bargaining. “Use this as an opportunity to calm down,” he says as Freddy rages at an unexpected wake-up call from The Bishop.

There is something sitcom-like in the way that Silva establishes deep familiarity, not just with his leads but with the wider ensemble. The Bishop is a recurrent character – parking cars, selling tat and occasionally lobbing homophobic abuse. He is kept in check by grandfatherly queer, Richard (Mark Margolis). Silva has also cast his brother (Agustín Silva), Maeby from *Arrested Development* (Alia Shawkat) and his actual cat – the latter being a playful scene-stealer. An inclusive family atmosphere burgeons, and with it the sense that we know the parameters of this world. *Nasty Baby* seems like a slightly cooler-than-normal numblecore flick with smart characters wrestling with personal aspirations and cerebral struggles.

Then the rug is whipped away. I beseech you all to avoid finding out what this practically entails. Avoid the treacherous IMDB synopsis. Experiencing the film organically morphing from a lo-fi concept to a world-encompassing treatise is astonishing. It’s like the aspect-ratio shift in Xavier Dolan’s *Mommy* but on a genre and philosophical level. In the momentum and moral confusion created by this bold expansion, Silva wrestles to the ground massive issues while transmitting a desire for open conversation as we make our way forward into the unknown. **SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN**



Dheepan

Directed by
JACQUES AUDIARD
Starring
JESUTHASAN
ANTONYTHASAN
KALIEASWARI SRINIVASAN
CLAUDINE VINASITHAMBY
Released
8 APRIL

3

ANTICIPATION.

Jacques Audiard follows up Rust & Bone with something a little different.

3

ENJOYMENT.

And it's great, until it's not great.

3

IN RETROSPECT.

Reasons to believe his next one could be great.

There's an amazing trick shot early on in Jacques Audiard's surprise Palme d'Or winner *Dheepan* where our eponymous hero (Jesuthasan Antonythasan), having managed to flee from Sri Lanka (where he was engaged as a foot soldier in the Tamil Tigers) to France, begins a new life selling novelty trinkets from a suitcase. All we see is flashing blue and red lights on a blanket of deep black, and it looks for a moment as if an aeroplane is landing at night. In terms of continuity, it would seem a wholly logical image. But it's actually the LEDs from plastic rabbit ears worn by a trio of vendors who go on to hector diners in a restaurant. This brand of high style is an Audiard trademark, but this new film mutes his kneejerk recourse to visual flash to make way for a more serious and timely exploration of the immigrant experience.

Dheepan is, for most of its runtime, a satisfyingly even-handed and non-judgmental story of culture shock. It's not an overtly political film, though Audiard makes it easy to place his characters and their actions against the backdrop of contemporary events. For the most part, it sets its stall as being remarkably pro-immigration, offering reason after reason why healthy Western economies should do their utmost to help people from politically volatile locales. But is offering aid enough? What's the point in amassing funds when there's no-one to help with that daunting task of leaping across the cultural and political chasm? Self-empowerment is one thing, but are we really aware of all the obstacles that lay in the way of those escaping violence and persecution?

Alongside his fake wife Illayaal (Claudine

Vinasithamby) and fake daughter Yalini (Kalieaswari Srinivasan), hastily assembled to fit the profiles of a stack of passports whose owners have no further use for them (i.e. their corpses are likely fuel for a large bonfire), the ill-matched trio are placed in a grubby suburban housing tenement which plays host to regular bouts of gang-related gunplay. At one point, a line is painted between two tenements as the territorial pissings of goons with too much spare time begin to stink up the place. Yet they all get on with the tasks at hand, "husband" taking on the role of caretaker, "mother" the role of social carer and "daughter" as inquisitive schoolgirl. There's a bracing honesty to the way Audiard presents his characters as earning the trust of the local community as they work tirelessly to improve lives; more interesting, though, is the strained and confusing relationships between the two phoney lovers.

A nervous tension arises around how long Audiard can keep all this good work up, how long he's going to be able to rein in his grandiose tendencies. Yet, as prior experience might have hinted, things go majorly downhill in its botched final act. Minor key observation gives way to hulking plot-twists and blood-sprayed shoot-outs, which gives us a chance to see *Dheepan*'s old self emerge once more, torturing, maiming and killing as he did when part of a rebel militia. This doesn't merely bring a cumbersome tonal shift, but undoes a lot of the highly nuanced and enlightened political discourse from earlier on. Almost.

DAVID JENKINS



Disorder

Directed by
ALICE WINOCOUR

Starring
MATTHIAS SCHOENAERTS
DIANE KRUGER
ZAÏD ERROUGUI-
DEMONSANT

Released
25 MARCH

4

ANTICIPATION.

Matthias Schoenaerts has lately been in a string of duds.

3

ENJOYMENT.

But now he's back and reminding us why we fell in love with him in the first place.

3

IN RETROSPECT.

Lots of good stuff here. Winocour will go on to make even stronger films.

You sense that there's a secret cadre of cloven-hoofed agents working out of Hollywood, California whose task it is to wheedle out untested mavericks who might just be able to make a go of it in the factory of dreams. Possessing the aptitude to able to make profound statements about life and humanity through gesture or nuance – that sublime melding of sound and image! – may not be so high on the list of desirable talents. But building up a moment of high dread, or inventively choreographing a violent altercation, or maybe just filming an actor in a way which makes them look desirable, might just be enough to foot that golden ticket.

But perhaps French director Alice Winocour is fine just where she is? While her new film *Disorder* showcases a bounty of moments and flashes that could easily be corralled into some frisky English-language B-picture, there's a uniquely European ambience to this tale of a taciturn soldier returning to France and importing the collected traumas of combat with him. Matthias Schoenaerts is Vincent, a veteran of the war in Afghanistan and, clad in a battered trackie top, he takes up a gig as a security guard. His clients are the wife, Jessie (Diane Kruger), and son, Ali (Zaïd Errougui-Demonsant), of a nefarious Lebanese businessmen who has left the three of them in the confines of his plush country mansion, Maryland. Vincent's brief is suspiciously light on detail, but the motives of the absent patriarch are indirectly revealed when shrieking assassins start diving through the windows with death in their eyes.

For the first hour of the film, Winocour plays on Vincent's extraordinary paranoia, cultivated no doubt when he was in a state of constant high alert on army manoeuvres. For him, pain and death aren't just lurking around every corner, but between shafts of light, or in minor alterations to the natural sound levels. The bark of a dog becomes an alarm call, just as a vague flicker in the middle distance could be the scope of the assassin's rifle glinting in the sun. While Vincent's mental fragility makes him a dab hand at his job, there are points where he takes things too seriously, and his irrational actions even place Jessie and Ali in additional peril.

There are hints of John Carpenter – especially a movie like *Assault on Precinct 13* – to *Disorder*, a comparison which is bolstered by its chilling ambient soundtrack from French techno artist Gesaffelstein. Schoenaerts' intricately-realised mania exemplifies the idea of the world caving in on itself, and you're always made to feel that Winocour's thematic ambitions always exceed the serviceably generic. Yet, by its closing frames, the film as a whole feels like a proposed idea without a satisfying end game. Kruger comes across as little more than a damsel in distress, while Vincent's paranoiac tendencies are merely a device around which to build necessary thrills. It does manage to push lots of buttons, and it pushes them hard and fast. So don't be surprised if the next time you see Winocour it's on a lengthy red carpet and flanked by Tinseltown A-listers.

DAVID JENKINS



Alice Winocour

A female director making a tense action thriller is a rare beast. We meet a new and great one.

Disorder (alternately titled *Maryland*) conjures dread with the help of an incredible sound design team and the intense music of techno artist Gesaffelstein. They reflect the constant anxiety of Vincent (Matthias Schoenaerts) a soldier just returned from Afghanistan. He finds work as security personnel looking after a rich man's home and, increasingly, his beautiful wife (Diane Kruger) and child. As the forces of darkness appear to stalk the trio, a classic thriller trope drives the tension: Is he paranoid or are they really out to get him? Its French director, Alice Winocour (who also co-wrote Deniz Gamze Ergüven brilliant *Mustang*) about paranoia, PTSD and the sometimes slippery distinction between war and peace.

"What I liked about Gesaffelstein's music, because I was a great fan, is that it's really violent but at the same time it's almost religious. There is something exhilarating about his music. With him, I could recreate the mental state of the soldier coming back from war. He spent four days with us on the shoot. I had a mood board,

I had almost 100 pictures of the atmosphere of the film, but he told me that images were not something he could be inspired by so he spent days with us in the house. We shot in a real house, in the French Riviera, Cap d'Antibes. We did a huge amount of work on the soundtrack to convey those little perceptions like breathing or small details because we really had to be in the character's head, in his sky-room, yeah, in his body.

I started to think about, to imagine, soldiers coming back from war. I met a lot of soldiers in a French hospital where they are sent when they have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or when they are in shock. Then at the end of the process of writing and doing the film I realised that I was talking about PTSD and that I had experience of PTSD myself from when I gave birth to my daughter. I almost died and I can remember only one thing about the whole experience: the sounds in the hospitals and the sounds of the machines. That's why the sound is so important in the film.

This character, Vincent, I imagined all the film in his head and from his point of view. The idea of the film from the scriptwriting stage was that we really had to be in a single point of view. I thought about the film as almost a sensory experience. You only had to understand what he could understand, you only had to see what he could see and you only had to hear what he could hear. The audience had to be as paranoid as the character. His paranoia is also in love in that he is always wondering: Does Jessie (Diane Kruger) have feelings for me? I put all my fears in the film. Fears from my childhood,

fear of the darkness, of the storm and more contemporary fears. You see this women in Raqqa with a kalashnikov taking her daughter to school. Those are real images that were shot by a woman who had a camera in her niqab. I had seen those GoPro images and found that they were amazing. What I tried to express in the film is this sensation of chaos and this feeling that with this constant flow of information that you get on your phone, on TV and everything you have this feeling of witnessing everything but at the same time of being completely powerless. But, it's of course also a love story even if it's a strange love story.

You are really in his point of view so you never know what is real and what is not real. What are the effects of the paranoia? Is the attack true or not true? Is his best friend really his best friend? Is the woman loving him or not? Are those politicians corrupted or not corrupted? Has the dog really disappeared or is it dead in the garden like it is in the thrillers? I tried really to put in all those double meanings. That's what is scary to me in the more contemporary world. You never know are we paranoid or are there terrorists in front of us? Suddenly, after the film, with the attack in Bataclan I felt something really weird, the feeling of suddenly being in the movie, like the whole country had got really post-traumatised by those events. There was a car crash in front of the bar where I was having a drink. Everyone was watching like, 'Wow is it an attack?' There is this hyper-vigilance that we are all in now. It is something like a war zone. When you are in a peaceful country this hyper-vigilance is like a madness but when there is a real danger – this hyper-vigilance is a way to survive" 🍷



The Measure of a Man

Directed by
STÉPHANE BRIZÉ
Starring
VINCENT LINDON
KARINE DE MIRBECK
MATTHIEU SCHALLER
Released
8 APRIL

4

ANTICIPATION.

This is the film that won the perennially undervalued Lindon the Best Actor award at Cannes.

4

ENJOYMENT.

An absorbing and enraging look at a broken system.

4

IN RETROSPECT.

Brizé and Lindon measure up.

If the art of listening is the key to good acting, then Vincent Lindon's performance in *The Measure of a Man* is a masterclass. He plays Thierry Taugourdeau, a longtime factory worker now seeking employment having been laid off in a round of redundancies some 20 months prior. For much of Stéphane Brizé's quietly engrossing character study, all he can do is sit and listen as a variety of people explain why his chances of finding a job are so limited. In the opening scene, we find him in an employment centre trying in vain to understand why the course he spent four months training on is useless because nobody informed him of an additional qualification that was required to land a job. All Thierry wants is to go back to work and provide for his family, but he's trapped in a system that keeps shifting the goalposts.

This is the third film in a row that Brizé and Lindon have made together, but it's the first time the director has relied so heavily on his leading man. Everyone else who appears in the film is a non-professional actor making their screen debut. Many of them suffered the same economic setbacks as the characters they are playing, and Brizé's quest for realism produces a number of scenes that are painful in their authenticity. Thierry and his wife try to sell their mobile home but the deal collapses into a squabble over the price; a bank manager proposes taking out life insurance, not too subtly suggesting that he may be worth more to his family dead than alive; an interview training group provides feedback on Thierry's presentation, picking apart every aspect of his demeanour. Lindon's nuanced and

deeply expressive performance shows us how each successive indignity chips away at his character's soul.

Brizé shifts the focus in the film's final third. Thierry finally succeeds in getting a job, working as a supermarket security guard, but this development only introduces a whole new set of complex moral issues into the film. He is tasked with observing and apprehending people who are often stealing solely because they can't make ends meet. There's something deeply unnerving about the way Thierry's colleague shows off the inescapable range of his multiple security cameras, and Lindon's work becomes even more impressive in this climactic stretch, as he charts his growing discomfort in this authoritarian role almost entirely through his face and body language.

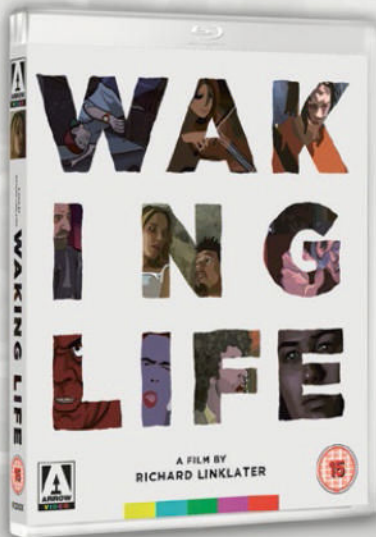
The Measure of a Man depicts the ways in which capitalism turns the working class stooges against one another and makes it feel like a spiritual sibling to the Dardenne brothers' *Two Days, One Night*. He frames his long takes in medium shots that allow Lindon and his co-stars to play out scenes in an unhurried and naturalistic way, making every moment feel alive and immediate, with a handful of domestic scenes between Thierry and his wife adding vital warmth to the picture. Aside from those brief interludes, this is a chilling portrait of the world that we now live in. Brizé gives us the measure of one man, but really Thierry is representing countless men and women; ordinary people who have been thrown on the scrapheap by a society that has decided it simply has no use for them. **PHIL CONCANNON**

A FILM BY
RICHARD LINKLATER

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High-Rise

Directed by

BEN WHEATLEY

Starring

TOM HIDDLESTON

JEREMY IRONS

SIENNA MILLER

Released

18 MARCH

4

ANTICIPATION.

Love Wheatley's Down Terrace and Kill List, and like his Sightseers and A Field of England.

4

ENJOYMENT.

Through the broad belly laughs it reaches dizzying, despairing heights.

5

IN RETROSPECT.

A multi-level blueprint of the UK's class politics, exposing the delirious ruins of Thatcher's utopian enterprise.

"Sometimes he found it difficult to believe in a future that had not already taken place." In Ben Wheatley's *High-Rise*, this line appears as an introductory voice-over from protagonist Robert Laing (Tom Hiddleston), who, three months after he has moved into the titular tower block, is taking stock and scribbling down his recent experiences. One sure sign of the self-alienating transformation that Laing has undergone since his arrival is the fact that he now refers to himself in the third

person. Another is the spectacle of him calmly barbecuing and eating a dog on his filth-strewn 25th-floor apartment balcony. Meanwhile, Laing's words, with their confusion of past, present and future, clearly set out the film's status as a work of postmodernism, as much a dizzying blueprint for who we are today as it is a forward-looking allegory of the festering political divisions of 1970s Britain.

Laing had moved into this new brutalist edifice as "an investment in the future", but in order to understand how his stay there has ended up in such unrestrained madness, we must revisit the events that took place in the intervening quarter. Accordingly the film too is Janus-faced, looking backwards and forwards, up and down, to take in the tower's panoramic purview. Itself set in 1975, *High-Rise* glances back to the homonymous 1975 novel by JG Ballard – but it can also look forward (with hindsight) to the prime ministership (commencing in 1979) of Margaret Thatcher and her programme of desocialising privatisation that has created the world in which we now all live. The private building after which the film is named, with its built-in gym, pool and supermarket, is a hermetic world unto itself, a microcosm of society's rigid class structures.

Even if the building was conceived by its architect Royal (Jeremy Irons) as "a crucible for change", the same old hierarchies keep reconstituting themselves. The working class – embodied by unemployed documentaryarian Wilder (Luke Evans), his serially pregnant wife Helen (Elisabeth Moss) and their ever-expanding brood of children – occupy the "lower levels". At the other extreme, Royal himself lives in the 40th-floor penthouse, nostalgically remodelled by his aristocratic wife Ann (Keeley Hawes) to resemble her childhood "country home" (complete with farm animals) so that she can "reassert herself on the rung". In between are the professional middle classes – people like Laing who, in keeping with his career as a physiologist, looks upon the building as a living organism with its own pathologies.

As Wheatley (*Kill List*, *A Field Of England*) documents the breakdown and restoration of order in a building that is, as Royal puts it, "still settling", there is something decidedly kaleidoscopic about the entire enterprise. Dialogue and sounds leak from one scene into the next; Laurie Rose's mobile, often hallucinatory cinematography swirls and reels, taking in the building and its many residents from all angles; and the metaphor of party politics is realised in a series of actual gatherings where class comes out to dance.

Unable to comprehend why his architectural experiment has not resulted in the great social metamorphosis that he had intended, Royal at first supposes that he has omitted some "vital element" – but by the end, amidst a violent revolution in which no real change takes place, he realises, "It wasn't that I left an element out – it was that I put too many in." This represents a note of self-conscious self-critique from a film that mixes comedy and horror, the satirical and the scatological, the high and the low, into a disorienting, dystopic mess, and asks us to revel in the beautiful, bewildering chaos of its manifold elements.

As the grand architect behind this folly, Wheatley has crafted a sublime complex that accommodates all manner of uncomfortable ideas about the atavism and entropy of modern(ist) living. With its bestial behaviours and carnivalesque capers in a Seventies milieu, the film would make an excellent double-feature with *Aaaaaaaah!*, directed by Wheatley's friend Steve Oram. Yet *High-Rise* also stands on its own as a macabre mythologisation of the libertine excesses to be found in both the human heart and the free market – of any era. Watching it is like seeing a multi-storied classic richly unravelling before, during and after its proper time. Such is the density of its different levels that repeat viewings will be amply rewarded – although cinemagoers will be unlikely to maintain Laing's middle position on the film's many polarising provocations.

ANTON BITEL





The Witch

Directed by
ROBERT EGGERS
Starring
ANYA TAYLOR-JOY
RALPH INESON
KATE DICKIE
Released
11 MARCH

4

ANTICIPATION.

Mega mega hype ting.

4

ENJOYMENT.

Gorgeous dark art.

4

IN RETROSPECT.

Its hypnotic spell lingers.

The great outdoors and the composition of human faces are both wrought with crisp definition in Robert Eggers' sumptuous debut, *The Witch*, which is being mis-sold as a horror film. God-fearing families, 17th century lifestyles, folkloric mystery and hauntingly grotesque tableaux are the ingredients with which Eggers plays. They are part of the iconography of horror, and the images scour themselves onto your brain thanks to their disturbing brilliance. But, simply put, there are no scares in this movie. Characters in horror films usually begin carefree and are gradually ambushed by fear. In *The Witch* fear defines the characters from the first frame, so there is no escalating tension or increased stakes. This is a dark mood piece that is made outstanding by rigorous recreation of period dialogue, eerie settings and captivating performances.

William (Ralph Ineson) causes his family to be exiled from their New England community as punishment for his wayward religious preaching. Ineson's voice is so low and rumbling that he sounds like an angry god, and even has a little of a Jesus-y look: long tawny brown hair and a noble moustache, albeit a sharper nose and more sunken features than Our Lord and Saviour. He is set up as an imposing patriarch only for his power to swiftly leak away and the space filled to capacity with supernatural confusion.

As soon as his family sets up camp in a chilly forest glade, their newborn baby disappears. William's wife, Katherine (Kate Dickie), is wracked with grief. Dickie's face is the craggy match for her husband's, whereas their children are milky of face and rosy of

cheek. The eldest, Thomasin (Anya Taylor-Joy) is on the cusp of womanhood. The beginnings of a bust blossom under her pious dress, tendrils of white-blond hair which hang loose from her head scarf. She is closest in age to Caleb (the fabulously named Harvey Scrimshaw). Freckles blaze across his perfect skin. Despite his youth, he has the heavy burdens of an adult male on his small shoulders. The isolated setting and duties of living off the land mean that there is no time for larking, although the mischief-loving, gap-toothed twins Mercy (Ellie Grainger) and Jonas (Lucas Dawson) find a way to run amok with the family's goat, Black Phillip.

While there is an external 'evil' made explicit early on, *The Witch* is primarily a portrait of a family destroying itself from within. It doesn't take much – the merest casual suggestion – for the adults to begin shrieking puritanical condemnation at their offspring. Accusing a sibling of being a witch initially seems like 17th century domestic banter ("Are you witches?", "Does father think I am?", "Are you?!") but parental reactions are so deadly serious that any humour perceived by an audience is apart from a story peopled by family members too scared of life to be able to love one another.

The precise, old-world dialogue lends an air of formality, which suits a setting that resembles a Grimm fairy tale. The colour palette is specific and rich: forest green, bleached corn yellow, the brown and cream uniform that all characters wear. When blood tarnishes these hues, it's a statement as informed by images as it is ideas.

SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN



Robert Eggers

***The Witch* puts in an early bid to be crowned 2016's scariest film. *LWLies* meets its director.**

You know the old saying about working with animals and children? Turns out there's some truth to it. Just ask production designer-turned-writer/director Robert Eggers, whose Sundance-winning period drama *The Witch* contains enough creatures and kids to fill a generously sized smallholding. Pitched as 'A New England Folktale', Eggers' impressive debut feature authentically transports us to 17th-century east-coast America where a family of Puritan peasants are visited by strange and evil forces.

LWLIES: HOW DID THE PROCESS OF MAKING OF THIS FILM COMPARE WITH YOUR EXPECTATIONS?

Eggers: Well, I had worked with kids before, I'd worked with animals, so I kind of knew what I was getting myself in for. But it was so much worse than I'd expected. So much more difficult. I remember our first meeting with the animal trainer, where we went through the script and all the stuff we needed the animals to do, basically they said that what we were asking for

wasn't practical, that none of it could happen, and my stomach just dropped.

DID YOU PROVE THEM WRONG IN THE END?

There were definitely some things that we had to adjust, but I'm very pleased with how all the stuff we did with the animals worked out. The goat was a total nightmare though. On the last day of the shoot, I had no idea whether we'd actually got the goat's performance or not. The hare and the raven were okay, but man, the goat...

SO HOW DO YOU DIRECT A GOAT? You don't.

DID YOU AT ANY POINT CRY DURING THE MAKING OF THIS FILM?

Oh yeah. I tried to stay calm and focused on set, but I definitely cried making my coffee in the morning more than once. But you can't let too much get to you because it's so crazy. You just have to deal with stuff and take things on the chin, like: 'Oh look, the set just burned down. Alright, well, I guess I'll just go over here and have a cigarette...'

DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING LINED UP FOR YOUR NEXT PROJECT?

I can't talk about it much right now, but I'm going to be making a medieval knight film. It's an epic, but it's similar to *The Witch* in that while the fantastical mythological beliefs of the time are real, the world smells like shit.

WHAT INTERESTS YOU ABOUT GENRE AND PERIOD?

I'm into the past and I'm into darkness and the dead and things, and I guess a lot of those things

fall into horror or fantasy. Actually I think that as we become more secularised and science becomes God, it's science-fiction films that are the ones asking the really interesting questions about what it means to be a human being. But for whatever reason the voices of the dead talk a lot louder to my imagination, so right now I'm interested in looking back.

RELIGION AND THE OCCULT ARE OBVIOUSLY A BIG PART OF THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF NEW ENGLAND, WHERE YOU GREW UP.

Yeah I mean, I kind of feel uncomfortable talking about this stuff because I spend most of my time when I'm not working looking at religion and mythology and the occult... I have this weird slightly conflicted relationship with those things.

A LOT OF THAT STUFF SEEMS TO HAVE COME BACK INTO FASHION, LIKE STUDYING THE OCCULT AND BEING INTERESTED IN THE PAST...

It's true, and I think part of the reason why people are relating to this movie is that it's like an artisanal hipster fucking horror movie or whatever.

IS THAT SUCH A BAD THING?

No, it's cool! What's not cool is the snobbery, but I mean, look at me, I look like a hipster... But the fetishisation of old-fashioned analogue technologies that we're seeing today, it's really nothing new. What's great is that we're now trying to remember what actually worked in the past, and if we can then realise that there's a lot of great knowledge there, we might actually get somewhere 🍷



Court

Directed by **CHAITANYA TAMHANE**
 Starring **VIRA SATHIDAR, VIVEK GOMBER,**
GEETANJALI KULKARNI
 Released **25 MARCH**

Chaitanya Tamhane's camera watches from a distance. His static wide shots capture the dramas of intersecting lives in Mumbai, letting meaning gradually reveal itself. Evidence accumulates until there is a vivid picture. The trial of a provocative singer named Narayan (Vira Sathidar) provides the story arc, but this is not a generic legal procedural. Tamhane plots his scenes to play out at a naturalistic pace, camouflaging social details within banal situations in the vein of the late, great Chantal Akerman. His depiction of the Indian judicial system is coruscating, but this is not immediately clear from the film's gentle tone.

Before Narayan is arrested he is shown teaching a group of small children. He chants three sets of questions and receives three sets of answers before the police come to escort him away. There are no hysterics or speeches, just one event interrupting another. He is up on the charge of inciting a sewerage worker to commit suicide through one of his songs. Vinay (Vivek Gumber) defends him in court. Nutan (Geetanjali Kulkarni) is the public prosecutor. Later we see both lawyers' home lives. The questing, progressive male will act like a sulky child to his parents. The female lawyer will pass a bus journey exchanging domestic tips with a friend. Their jobs are just a part of their day.

It is marvelous that Tamhane doesn't weight any of his scenes more heavily than others, especially when the content ranges from lightly humorous to totally infuriating. Narayan is a harmless if defiant old man of ailing health. It is an insult against reason that he is being tried for causing suicide by song. Institutional corruption and outdated laws mingle together making it impossible to fully understand which is the key influence over individual authority figures. By showing his characters from an inscrutable distance, letting us appreciate their foibles without understanding them inside-out, Tamhane indicts the legal system itself, rather than characters within it coasting on the waves of their lives. **SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN**

ANTICIPATION.

Coming to Court totally unprepared.

3

ENJOYMENT. *A methodical expose of unfairness within the Indian judicial system.*

4

IN RETROSPECT.

Perceptive and powerful.

4



The Ones Below

Directed by **DAVID FARR**
 Starring **CLÉMENCE POÉSY, DAVID MORRISSEY,**
STEPHEN CAMPBELL MOORE
 Released **11 MARCH**

“You don't deserve that thing inside you!” It may be said in the bitter blindness of grief, but this line from *The Ones Below*, addressed to pregnant Kate (Clémence Poésy) by her neighbour Teresa Baker (Laura Birn), cuts to the very heart of Kate's anxieties about maternity. A troubled family history and a difficult relationship with her own mother (Deborah Findlay) have meant that Kate has taken 10 years even to consider having a baby with husband Justin (Stephen Campbell Moore). With perfect timing, the similarly pregnant Teresa and her controlling, cleanfreak older husband Jon (David Morrissey) move into the vacant apartment downstairs. Kate immediately warms to Teresa's devoted enthusiasm – contrasting with Kate's own hesitancy – for bringing a baby into the world.

“It's not that it's ugly,” Kate comments on the Bakers' newly, too-neatly manicured back lawn, “It's just that it's really determined to be a garden.” This determination extends to Jon and Theresa's life-mission of creating their own picture-perfect nuclear family. When a tragic accident takes that possibility away, the vacuum is filled with a toxic mix of recrimination, envy and covetousness in which their determination will transgress all neighbourly boundaries. For amid all the usual stresses and pressures of being a parent, Kate is also growing convinced that the Bakers have sinister designs on her newborn – suspicions which seem confirmed by shots, at least some objective, of Teresa's furtive activities while babysitting.

A tale of two flats, of two pregnancies and of two colours (muted blues for the Pollards, alarming citron yellows for the Bakers), *The Ones Below* establishes a dramatic upstairs/downstairs clash of styles and outlooks, before moving into thrilling, claustrophobic spaces. The plot gestates tautly, before the truth, no less harrowing for being expected, comes out. **ANTON BITEL**

ANTICIPATION.

Not sure what to expect.

3

ENJOYMENT. *In thrall to Roman Polanski, and all the better for it.*

4

IN RETROSPECT.

Can't wait to see David Farr's next baby.

4



Marguerite

Directed by **XAVIER GIANNOLI**
 Starring **CATHERINE FROT, ANDRÉ MARCON,**
MICHEL FAU
 Released **18 MARCH**

M*arguerite* is poignant to anyone interested in the painful gulf that can exist between an individual's creative ambition and their talent. Xavier Giannoli gives a '20s Parisian spin to the case of wealthy American society singer, Florence Foster Jenkins – who is receiving her own biopic starring Meryl Streep. Given the extreme empathy that Giannoli shows for his laughing-stock leading lady, it feels cruel to report that his life, while not fully imitating his art, possesses a shadow of a parallel. *Marguerite* suffers from a storytelling tameness that erodes the power of its subject.

At the centre of the film is a hugely sympathetic performance by Catherine Frot. *Marguerite*'s delusions about the quality of her singing continue because of a conspiracy of silence. Husband Georges is distracted by his affair, manservant Madelbos wants to make his name from her farcical fame and is also blackmailing a singing teacher. Although she conducts herself with grace and discretion, Frot's sad eyes and sorrowful pauses suggest that she feels the personal disappointments that surround her. The more acutely this is felt, the more important singing her heart out becomes. And so, the tragicomedy of her situation intensifies.

Giannoli has spent effort to recreate the decadent furnishings and costumes of a wealthy woman from this era. Yet there is a stultifying emptiness to the cavernous interiors and an inertia to the story's pacing which causes nearly all scenes to drag. Frot's bad singing is a joy that re-energises the people watching inside and outside the film. The entertainment value of her inability is almost an art unto itself, although her innocence as to the audience's true source of pleasure makes her a victim of exploitation. **SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN**

ANTICIPATION.

Well-received in its native France.

3

ENJOYMENT.

The heart is there but the rest of the body is lacking.

3

IN RETROSPECT.

A timeless tune sung in an average voice.

3



Speed Sisters

Directed by **AMBER FARES**
 Released **25 MARCH**

There's something hearteningly ramshackle about Amber Fares' fly-on-the-dashboard documentary which glances into the lives of a Palestinian, all-female motorsport team. It certainly puts paid to F1 chief Bernie Ecclestone's recent remarks that women driving cars just look "silly". There are rivalries and tantrums, heroes and villains, but the material remains loosely episodic, never forcibly cobbled into a standardised sports movie arc. So where the structure of a multi-race championship gives the film its basic momentum, Fares is just as interested in looking into her characters' equally-eventful personal lives.

Marah, Mona, Betty and Noor are the chosen protagonists, front and centre being the antagonism between glamorous media darling Betty, and homely, modest Marah. It soon becomes obvious that *Speed Sisters* can't offer a conventional sports movie narrative due to the tumult of extenuating political circumstances, and it's this surfeit of small barriers which make the movie so compelling. The problems of your practice track being located in a spot which may mean having to dodge flying tear gas canisters gives some idea of what these women are up against. And then you've got the tide of cultural conservatism that dictates that what these women are doing is offensive and they should really all be working as nurses. And on top of that, the sports federation in which the women are competing (run entirely by men, of course) is corrupt to its marrow, with rules literally being created and justified via personal whim.

It's always the background detail that's most interesting – the drama comes from the women actually getting to the track, not from their activities at the track itself. The film avoids directly discussing the fraught and violent political situation, though Fares makes sure its evident in every frame. **DAVID JENKINS**

ANTICIPATION.

A neat new angle on life in Palestine.

3

ENJOYMENT.

Great characters and drama both on and off the track.

3

IN RETROSPECT.

It's a scrappy piece of work, but all the more fascinating for it.

3



The Wages Of Fear

Directed by HENRI-GEORGES CLOUZOT	1953
Starring YVES MONTAND CHARLES VANEL PETER VAN EYCK	Released 28 MARCH
	Blu-ray/DVD

There are bleak movies, and then there's Henri-Georges Clouzot's *The Wages of Fear*, a work whose eventual message is: life is a meaningless nightmare of suffering. It tells you this just before everyone and everything is blown to smithereens in a giant ball of hellfire. Unemployment prevents surly exiles from escaping a dead-end Mexican shithole. There's nothing to do all day but sit on a step and let your whiskers grow too long. There are no nearby towns, and air tickets are prohibitively expensive. So when the unscrupulous duty manager at an American-owned oil concern announces a quick-buck job opening to transport a truck-load of highly volatile liquid explosives across mountains [cut: -ous climes in order] to close up a well which has caught fire, it's a case of asking whether you die now or die later. This is a movie which is down on just about everything: capitalism, friendship, the landscape, technology, employment, existence, even the thin slither of happiness that you might get to experience momentarily just once in a lifetime. And yet, to watch it, no doubt perched on the very edge of whatever seating apparatus you happen to be using, is to experience pleasure in its purest form. Yves Montand's dashing brave Mario is teamed up with Charles Vanel's shady huckster Jo as the pair navigate their unwieldy truck down dirt tracks and craggy paths, making sure their cargo of nitroglycerine is kept as still as possible. It's a film which realises the upsetting notion that our lives dangle at the end of a thin thread which is under constant attack from random possibility. It ponders whether it's better to face up to the realities of death or allow happiness, joy and love to help us forget all about it. It's one of those movies that is best chased with an extremely stiff drink. **DAVID JENKINS**



Macbeth

Directed by ROMAN POLANSKI	1971
Starring JON FINCH FRANCESCA ANNIS MARTIN SHAW	Released 15 MARCH
	Blu-ray

That sound you can hear in the distance is the party poppers being pulled by a thousand UK cinephiles, elated at the news that one of the US's most cherished home entertainment labels, Criterion, are opening for business on home turf. No more ridiculous import fees or searching for modified players that can handle Blu-rays with out-of-town region coding. We finally get a seat at this most vaunted of buffets. One of their first releases in the UK is Roman Polanski's 1971 version of *Macbeth*, starring a never-better Jon Finch as the mad eyed usurper of the Scottish crown. With films like *Knife in the Water* and *Repulsion*, Polanski set out his stall as a master of locating psychological drama within enclosed spaces, and with his *Macbeth*, the prison exists as an interior rather than exterior prison. The grotesque violence at the core of the play is realised with gaudy relish in the film's opening shot, as the Thane of Glamis is shown clubbing the last traces of life from a twitching corpse on the battlefield. Indeed, this is perhaps the closest a film version of 'Macbeth' has come to resembling a horror film. What makes this one of the great Shakespeare adaptations for screen, however, is that Polanski translates the text (with famed critic Kenneth Tynan on screenwriting detail) in as direct a manner as possible, never attempting to make the text resonate at the specific time of its release. While the concerns of 'Macbeth' boast a near-universal reach, there is no need to reframe the action so the story talks about different time or a different place. This exemplary Criterion release is packed with the carefully curated extras upon which the company have, since their inception, been able to build their esteemed name. **DAVID JENKINS**



Reform School Girls

Directed by TOM DESIMONE	1986
Starring LINDA CAROL WENDY O WILLIAMS PAT AST	Released NOW
	Blu-ray

If Hollywood has told us anything, it's that going to prison in the 1980s was absolutely brilliant. The company's cool, the rules are lax, and the sexual liaisons are erotic rather than enforced. Caught for driving the escape vehicle for her jagoff boyfriend after a bungled heist, Jenny (Linda Carol) is sent down for hard time in an all-girls reform school that's styled a little like an MTV prisoner of war camp. Her twin nemeses take the form of Amazonian fetish-wear hellion, Charlie Chambliss (Wendy O Williams, one-time lead singer of punk-metal exhibitionists, The Plasmatics), and kitten-stomping wench, Edna (Pat Ast), the brutal warden. Becoming wise to the tribal ways of prison life, Jenny eventually settles into her groove, learning many of the key rules and rituals while soaking off in the always-busy communal shower. She takes Lisa (Sherri Stoner) under her wing, a foster-home casualty who's too weak to roll with the punches of her scantily clad life behind bars. Charlie is quick to pick up on this weakness, and use it to her advantage. Far more interesting than just a prolonged soft focus T&A montage, the film is actually fun and funny in spots, with one-time Warhol muse Ast in particular going all out when it comes to ramping up the comic grotesquerie. Williams, who resembles a character displaced from a *Mad Max* movie, invests her all into the role, with wild energy levels far exceeding her modest acting abilities. It's gratifying that there are barely any male characters in the film, and that writer-director Tom DeSimone doesn't use the film to frame a hackneyed battle of the sexes. The rivalries stem from class and racial divisions, and the chain of command is formed by those able to wield sheer brute force when a situation requires it. But if you enjoy movies with music-driven, all-girl smackdowns at ten minute intervals, then step right up. **DAVID JENKINS**



Something Different

Directed by VERA CHYTILOVÁ	1963
Starring VLADIMIR BOSAK EVA BOSÁKOVÁ JIRÍ KODET	Released NOW
	Blu-ray

Let's quickly begin by mentioning the 43-minute feature that's also bundled onto this disc, as it is quite brilliant. Vera Chytilová's *A Bag of Fleas* mostly takes place in an all-girl dormitory with the camera adopting the perspective of one of the tenants. This means that, throughout the film, characters might flash a cheeky smile and a wink to the lens in show of female camaraderie. But this is no mere behavioural study, as the girls are all enrolled on an internship programme for a cotton mill, and they soon realise they're trapped between the desire for personal freedom and the chance to slot seamlessly, anonymously into the communist machine of early '60s Czechoslovakia. It's a vivacious and artful piece of filmmaking, about breaking free of conformist constraints. And if that wasn't enough, the main attraction here is Chytilová's striking feature debut, *Something Different*, which is as great and as important as her kaleidoscopic, anarchic 1966 classic, *Daisies*. The film weaves concurrent tales of middle-aged women: on one side we have a housewife struggling to bring up her only son, and has an extra-marital affair to ease the pain; on the other, we have a famous ballet dancer who is practicing tirelessly for a big competition. As with *Daisies*, the brilliance of this film stems from the fact that *Something Different* doesn't feel forced, never relying on clumsy dramatic twists or contrived narrative overlaps for fear of diminishing the poetic naturalism. In fact, by the end, it's not even certain why the director chose to place these two women together in the same film – perhaps it's a statement on human individuality and a stealthy attack on cinema's predilection for crass gender generalisation?

DAVID JENKINS



The Vikings

Directed by RICHARD FLEISCHER	1958
Starring KIRK DOUGLAS TONY CURTIS ERNEST BORGNINE	Released 7 MARCH
	<i>Blu-ray</i>

The competition isn't particularly strong, but we can say with a degree of certainty that Richard Fleischer's salty 1958 historical adventure film, *The Vikings*, is the greatest ever film made about Vikings. A toothsome Kirk Douglas excels as ass-grabbing, axe-throwing, meat-chomping Viking prince Einar, who lives to serve the will of his ass-grabbing, axe-throwing, meat-chomping father, Ragnar, played by Ernest Borgnine. English moustache-twirlers take their eye off the ball and so their princess is kidnapped and spirited away to the Norwegian countryside to become a beautiful bargaining chip. Also in the mix is Tony Curtis' embittered slave Eric, wearing leather hot paints so scandalously short that it's hard to know where to look when he's on screen. There's a hawk-based eye-plucking and a nifty gymnastics scene involving longboat oars, and then pieces are all in place for a marauding raid on the cliff-side fortress of those English ninnies. It's Douglas' wildman presence keeps things interesting, particularly his willingness to carry out gravity-defying stunts in his quest for absolute victory. While the story itself is a hokey mish-mash of coincidence, cod mythology and conceited diplomacy, director Fleischer does his absolute best to keep the fun quotient as high as physically possible. An example is the final sword fight which takes place on the slopes of a precarious spire, with the camera looking down as the combatants swash their buckles as instant death looms below them. It's an exquisitely constructed film, too, with gorgeous shots of the Norwegian fjords (care of Jack Cardiff), Orson Welles adding gravitas to proceedings as the narrator, and a horn-driven theme song whose central motif will burrow itself deep into your psyche and remain there forever. **DAVID JENKINS**



A Brighter Summer Day

Directed by EDWARD YANG	1991
Starring CHANG CHEN LISA YANG CHANG KUO-CHU	Released 21 MARCH
	<i>Blu-ray</i>

"I was bored from hiding out so I'd read ten swordsman novels a day. I told them to rent me the thickest book they could find. I found that people in the past were just like us street gangs. There was this one dude... everyone thought he went cuckoo... I remember that everyone had run away and the city was ablaze... He alone stayed to assassinate Napoleon... In the end he failed and was caught... 'War and Peace'... I forgot the titles of all the swordsman novels. This is the only one I remember." This line of dialogue from Edward Yang's intimate 1991 epic epitomises its tragic story about individuals locked in the violent sway of political upheaval. It's spoken by gang leader, Honey, in exile for having killed a man who tried to get with his girl – Ming. Yet this majestic and devastating film, set in Taiwan during the early 1960s, orbits around Chang Chen's S'ir, a quiet, bookish teen whose wild mood swings seem to echo that of his country's erratic political machinery. The film, which borrows its English title from the lyrics to Elvis Presley's ballad, 'Are You Lonesome Tonight', shows the deluge of Western culture that helped further complicate Taiwan's national identity crisis. But the film unfurls as a majestic prose poem, accruing details, focusing on small but vital moments, switching perspectives, capturing the actions of large warring factions and starry-eyed couples. In the process, it lets us into the lives of some 100 speaking characters. It's a long, slow burn that, at just under four hours, never panders to the structure of, say, a serialised TV show, which is built around regular cliffhangers. This is a major coup for Criterion as it's a film classic that has been near impossible to see for far too long.

DAVID JENKINS



Barcelona

Directed by WHIT STILLMAN	1994
Starring TAYLOR NICHOLS CHRIS EIGEMAN MIRA SORVINO	Released 18 APRIL
	Blu-ray

Though it was one of those brave few movies to get an early DVD release, arriving in one of those crappy cardboard boxes with the awkward plastic clasp, Whit Stillman's second feature, *Barcelona*, has become a complete bastard to track down. Praise be to the lords of home entertainment solutions, then, that Criterion have come charging to the rescue, including the film in a box-set package of the director's early trilogy – along with 1990's *Metropolitan* and 1998's *The Last Days of Disco*. Stillman's films are first and foremost exalted for their immaculate, urbane dialogue, but *Barcelona* should be praised for its ravishing depiction of the Spanish capital. It's a unique and affectionate view of a city, the hushed vistas, depopulated streets and looming structures emphasising the faint rumblings of political unrest during the late 1980s. A wave of anti-American sentiment was flaring up at the time, and trapped in the eye of this particular storm are Taylor Nichols' fussbudgety trade envoy Ted, and his proud, scheming cousin Fred (Chris Eigeman), a one-man NATO advance party in town to gauge any geopolitical ill will. Within moments of meeting, the bickering begins, and the scenes in which they wax mundane on romance and nostalgia, are the film's most delightful. From its beginnings as an eccentric sex comedy, the film develops into something darker and more ambitious, as the pair's amorous scheming is taken over by the feeling that their lives may be in mortal danger. Stillman takes great pleasure in mocking a particularly American form of priggishness and patriotism, at the same time lavishing praise on progressive European attitudes to music, food, courtship, sex and realising personal dreams.

DAVID JENKINS



Woman on the Run

Directed by NORMAN FOSTER	1950
Starring ANN SHERIDAN DENNIS O'KEEFE ROSS ELLIOTT	Released 19 APRIL
	Blu-ray

One of those lost golden nuggets that has managed to shimmy its way to the surface of modern film culture, Norman Foster's (no relation) superb San Francisco-set noir thriller packs insane amounts of action and energy into its 79 minute runtime. It's rediscoveries like this that make you thankful for the work of festivals, programmers and researchers who make it their professional duty to make sure great cinema like this isn't lost to the sands of time. Paramount among its countless pleasures is actor Ann Sheridan who aces every line she delivers and every expression she flashes towards the lens. She plays Eleanor Johnson, the fatigued wife of aspiring painter Frank (Ross Elliott). One night when Frank is out walking the dog, perhaps using the ritual as a reason to get away from his spouse, he witnesses a gangland murder and, spotting his shadow in the distance, the perpetrator fires shots his way. Understandably, Frank goes AWOL, and so both the police and the press jostle for Eleanor's affections to find him. Though the procedural structure of finding a missing person is one of the key characteristics of noir cinema, this film is just as interested in exploring Eleanor's fragile psychological state and the conflict of whether she actually wants to be reunited with a person she was perhaps on the verge of leaving anyway. Though full of trigger-happy bruisers who see life as cheap, *Woman on The Run* is about how being forcibly separated from a friend, partner or loved-one is a way to reevaluate your relationship with them, and maybe remember what made it so special in the first place. Things come to a hyperactive head at a fairground, and the whole sequence is assembled with such gusto that you can easily forgive some of the (very) rough edges. **DAVID JENKINS**

New Queer Visions



The chilled atmosphere in the basement bar of Shoreditch's ACE hotel is spiked with a frisson of anticipation. All seats are taken and some guests sit cross-legged on the concrete floor, sipping from glasses, like they're at a music festival. Simon Savory, founder and host of New Queer Visions, steps up to relay the running order of the night and to say that all ticket money is going to Time Out Youth – a charity based in North Carolina with a mission of, 'empowering lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth.' The reason why this particular organisation was chosen will become clear before the half-way mark.

The first half 'Looking Anew' is composed of shorts from Indonesia, Mexico, South Africa and the USA. All possess merit and magnetism but like a total hick, my favourites are both American. *Stevie* absolutely crushes it on the strength of a comic timing that has to be god-given and cannot be taught. Chloe Jury Fogel wrote, directed and starred in this story about an 18-year-old basketball-loving tomboy who, after the alarming event of a new boy in town asking her out, goes along with things despite being more intrigued by his sister. Fogel has perfected the art of transitioning from deadpan to dread with just a widening of the eyes. As a director she nails all sources of humour surrounding the sexually inexperienced and confused teen without ever taking pleasure from her pain. She pillories the awkwardness of dating, having siblings, post-date goodbyes and of not being the person society expects you to be.

Brockington, by Sergio Ingato, Mason Sklut and Maggie Sloane, initially appears to be *Stevie* through the looking glass. This 8-minute documentary is all about Blake Brockington, an 18-year-old trans boy who went through sexual abuse, family upheaval, self-harm and transphobic bullying but now seems to be living life on his own terms and with a doting girlfriend in Charlotte, North Carolina. He beams a beautiful smile as he recounts the story of his life to the camera crew. He has been the victim of massive

trauma but has also received the mass gender validation of being elected Homecoming King. You have the feeling that maybe – hopefully! – the worst is behind him. As the film appears to be ending, title-cards reveal that Blake committed suicide. The jolt between the sunny persona of the young man we saw owning his situation and the stormy sorrow that consumed him seems to express the core of New Queer Visions. The night exists to joyfully celebrate marginalised lives, but the prejudice that still visits itself upon marginalised lives is deadly serious and a matter of profound sorrow.

The second half 'Brit Bits + filmmaker Q&A' is self-explanatory. The presence of talent from each of this section's four films leads to a charming, frank and slightly booze-fuelled post-viewing discussion. The director of *Mirrors*, Neil Ely, and the director of *Closets*, Lloyd Eyre-Morgan, have the repartee of people who know each other well. "How did you meet?" asks Simon. There is a pause. "We're exes," says Lloyd. *Mirrors* is entirely set in the toilets of a Manchester club. Two young men start chatting after they end up cheek-to-cheek in the same cubicle. They initially both pretend to be straight but as they come up on MDMA, pretences slip. It's funny because both see through each other from the outset, but are happy to go through the required conversational dance.

Closets is a time-travel movie that Lloyd is developing into a feature film. It opens in the '80s. A young teenager's mum finds him cross-dressing and says she's kicking him out. He climbs into the closet and emerges in the present day to find a gay kid with a scantily-clad Tom Daley calendar living in his revamped room. They freak each other out for a comically dramatic stretch but end up exchanging notes on their contrasting lives. The time-travel construction proves a simple but effective device for examining how social acceptance of queer identities has changed over the last three decades. But all is not well in the present depicted in *Closets*, as within the wider world ❄️

Rotterdam Film Festival



We had an absolute blast attending the 45th edition of the Rotterdam International Film Festival. The opportunity to power through an arduous daily schedule of movies that may never make it to your local multiplex is valuable, allowing as it does a sample flavour of titles that come in all manner of mis-shapen sizes and styles. Filipino counter-culture celebrity Khanvn was in town breaking records by playing a live piano score to his 13 hour feature *Simulacrum Tremendum*. He was spotted the next day with plasters on all of his fingers. Elsewhere there was Fukada Koji's *Sayonara*, a film whose main cast member is a female, wheelchair-bound android who is played by a real android.

These weird and wonderful selections aside, this year's festival got us thinking about the art of the post-screening Q&A. These are a mainstay of festivals across the globe, giving filmmakers a chance to interact directly with their audience. As a veteran of these events, they can often run the gamut between being a philosophical and highly satisfying public discourse, and a complete, abject, embarrassing horrorshow. The first thing you need is a good moderator who has a list of pre-prepared questions. At a film-festival like Rotterdam, programmers usually have to hopscotch between Q&A sessions, and so they perhaps don't have the time to flesh out their initial line of enquiry. There was an occasion this year where a moderator opened by professing a great love of a movie and boasted of having seen it on multiple occasions, but was then unable to muster a single decent question, much to the chagrin of the filmmakers.

On the other hand, there were times when a difficult movie was opened up because of a simple, probing question posed by an inquisitive programmer. Even though these filmmakers are sometimes talking about their movies for the first time in the public sphere, the story of how the project came about (which is a standard opener) reflects the

fact that the moderator hasn't engaged with the film directly, and can often build up a sense of bemusement. One of the key skills required by a moderator is knowing the exact moment to open up questions to the floor. If you hog the subject for too long, you can have people streaming for the exits. But if you admonish your responsibilities too early, the creative juices in the minds of the seated patrons may not have had a chance to get flowing.

But there are other variables too. One of the main venues for public screenings at Rotterdam is a multiplex cinema whose screens have obviously been designed to house loud, flashy effects movies. Watching a bizarre, slippery documentary-fiction hybrid such as Mike Ott and Nathan Silver's *Actor Martinez* in an eyeline-bothering IMAX screen had a certain novelty to it, but when it came to the Q&A, the geography of the room prevented anything even close to coherence. Far better are the smaller screens at the amazing Cinerama, whose petit auditoriums give Q&As the feel of an intimate discussion circle. As such, cosier rooms seem to provoke a higher standard of interrogation from paying pundits, as it's easier to react to both the "talent" in the room, and the ideas put forth by fellow attendees.

Maybe one thing that characterises Rotterdam as a festival – certainly from a personal vantage – is that it selects films by directors who listen to the questions being asked of them at Q&As. And they respond to the questions that are being asked – no rambling asides or wads of obscure context. They're not so personable that audience members feel like they can publicly unburden themselves of details pertaining to their own art projects which might have a vague overlap with the film just seen. But they're not so soaring a presence that the questions become bogged down in technical jargon and obscure reference points. Rotterdam manages to score that perfect mix 🍷

In Bed With Madonna

- DIRECTED BY -

Alex Keshishian

- STARRING -

Madonna,
Warren Beatty,
Sandra Bernhard

- TRAILERS -

*Tales of The Silver Pickle,
The Watercooler Killer,
I'm Levar Burton, A Simple
Minds Christmas*

- CHERRYPICK -

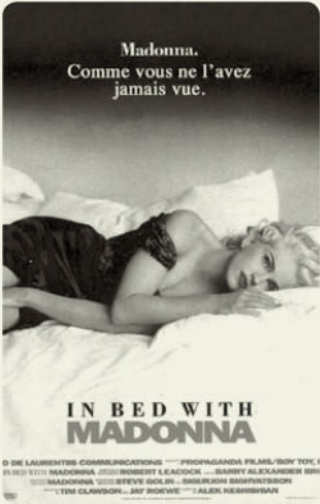
*"The ultimate
dare is to tell the truth."*

- TAGLINE -

*'We are dedicating this show to Keith Haring... who doesn't
have the luxury of being alive... like we do.'*

- RELEASED -

1991



There is a scene in Oliver Hershberger's cautionary Nazi parable *Downfall* that, thanks to ongoing football-based YouTube pastiches, you may be familiar with even if - bovine wastrel that you are - you have never seen the film. In a bunker deep beneath Berlin a group of squeaky-bummed, you-first generals explain to der Führer that there are a good many burly Russian gentlemen currently arriving into town and who might be wanting a word or two with him. After a perfectly timed comedy pause, Adolf explodes into a fit of uncontainable anger that lurches toward racially-pure frustration before settling into a war-weary yet petulant resignation that those around him are too weak and trivial to fully understand or support his world-girdling vision. Chinless subordinates quiver. Secretaries weep, '40-style, into the shoulders of each other's cardies. The air is thick with fear, confusion and the browning of shirts. What will the great leader do next?

This same sense of mania, muted tyranny, job insecurity and general scared-shitlessness permeates every single frame of Alex Keshishian's 1991 documentary feature, *In Bed With Madonna*.

Yeah, yeah - we realise that comparing a driven global megastar to a egomaniacal despot won't have too many of you choking on your overpriced uptown cereal. But the dark tower of autocratic censure, blind self-justification and jejune will-to-power that La Ciccone climbs in this piebald document of her - oh, brüder! - 'Blond Ambition' world tour is so titanic, misshapen and rancid as to invite singular rebuke. Here ruthlessness is an endgame, and it is played with no little craft.

Stomping, squawking and strong-arming her way through every vaguely human interaction like a coddled peroxide shrike, our heroine is clearly under the impression that acting like a hateful, entitled *enfant terrible* (eng translation: 'prick toddler') to everyone she encounters

constitutes manifest testament to her status as A Great Artist (aka The Tom Hardy Solution). Indeed, if she is not the luminous avatar of some unconquerable aesthetic stronghold that outshines all our northern lights - some High Brazil where Elvis, Truffaut and WB Yeats are all on the same quiz team and Rembrandt is saving a seat for Radiohead - then furiously flicking the bean to a bizarro live version of 'Like a Virgin' arranged for glockenspiel and Bhangra is going to look very silly indeed.

Positioning herself as the would-be den mother to her cabal of noxiously cruel and self-defeatingly catty male dancers, Her Madge is surrounded by a daring and darling Gestapo that insulates her from the buckets and bolts of the non-miraculous world. None of her musicians - those faceless, replaceable shits! - are ever seen or mentioned. Her father, brother and a clearly damaged schoolfriend are gleefully invited into the outer sanctum only to be treated like boils on the back of a pig that was only ever destined to be pushed off a belltower for the pleasure of the villagers.

Yet perhaps the purest moment in the whole film comes when the Material Girl's make-up assistant - a dowdy, confused female version of 'luded up *Wolf of Wall Street*-era Jonah Hill - tells her employer that she believes she was date-raped by a bunch of bad lads the previous evening. To say that Madonna laughs in her unfortunate underling's unfabulous face and goes back to flashing her breasts to her increasingly uninterested gay dancers, behaving dreadfully toward Kevin Costner and being (just about) raunchy enough for her tour to be (threatened to) be banned (in Canada) is just simply true.

In the interest of balance, it behoves us to admit that the music here is uniformly excellent. But the Nazis had cool uniforms, so, y'know, nobody's all bad... 🇩🇪



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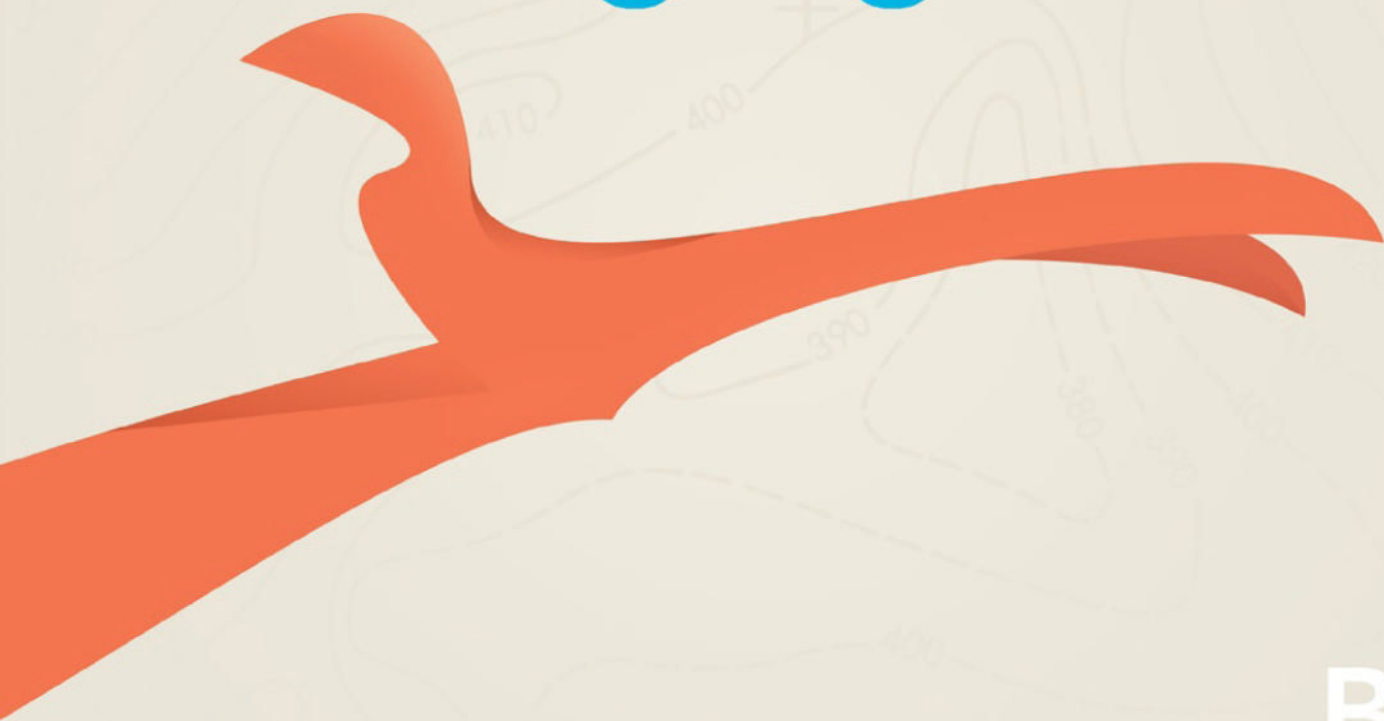


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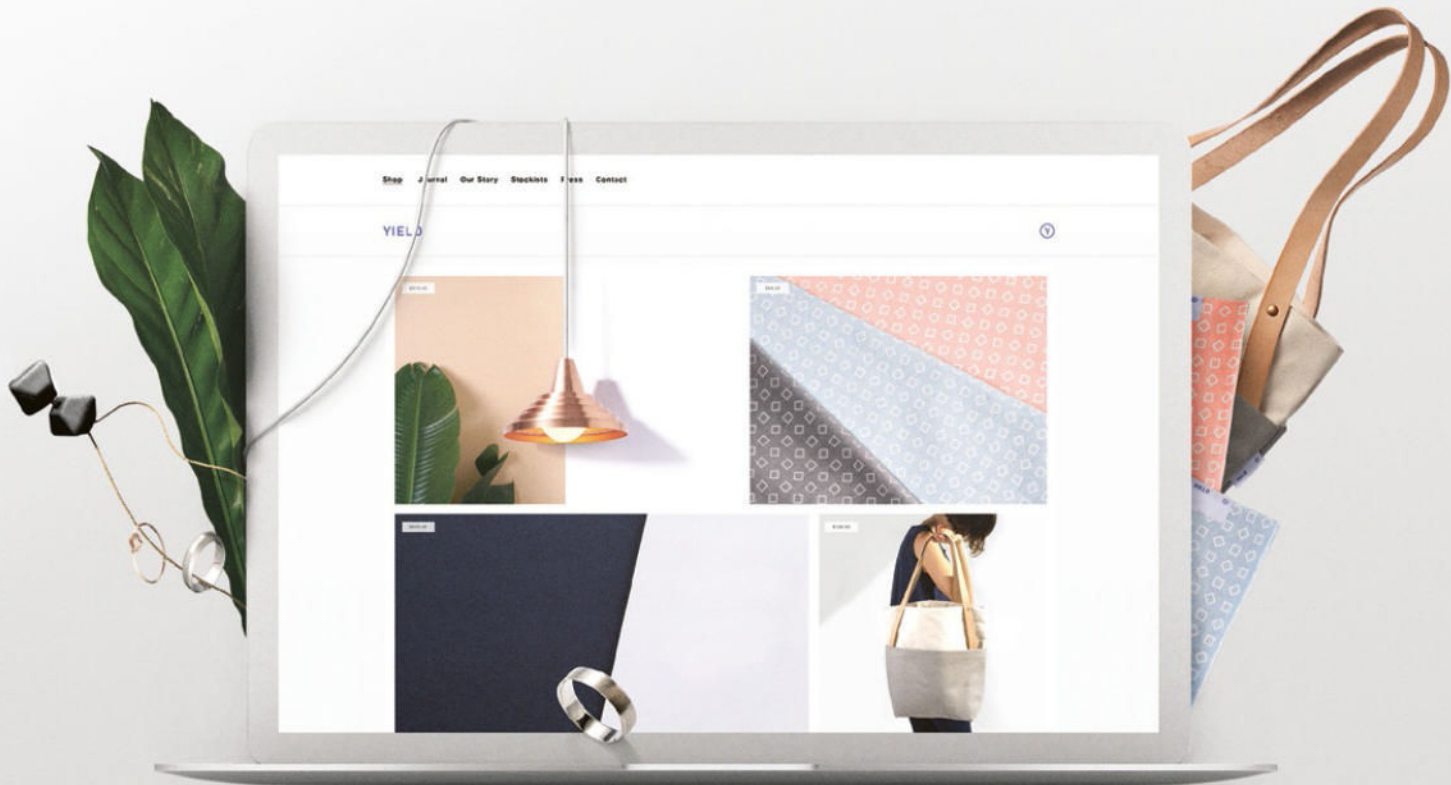
LWLIES:

What do you love about movies?

MIGUEL GOMES:

Two days ago, Jacques Rivette died. This was a guy who I really admired. I admired his cinema. I was reading an obituary and he once said: 'every director who can call themselves a director has the obligation not to be an author, but to create the conditions that allow a film to become a living organism.' And he was very good at doing that. When you are writing a script, the film is not alive yet. It's not born. It's the beginning. I love this about movie making. It's very exciting when you see something being born and you don't know how to deal with it. You have to adjust. And you know that it will never be the same baby twice. You have to follow a path that hasn't been pre-determined. First you walk, then you try and understand where you're going.





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